

EUGENIA



Albert T. Tamm

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EUGENIA:

AN EPISODE.

BY

WILLIAM MONEY HARDINGE,
AUTHOR OF "CLIFFORD GRAY."

" Glory to God—to God," he saith,
" Knowledge by suffering entereth,
And Life is perfected—in Death!"

E. B. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE.
1883.
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“And lives and works, what are they all at last, except the roads to
faith and death?”

—WALT WHITMAN.

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Book the Second.

—o—

LOVE, THE CROSS.

(Continued.)

“ Listen, Eugenia,
How thick the bursts come crowding
through the leaves !
Again, thou hearest ?
Eternal passion
Eternal pain.”

—MATTHEW ARNOLD.

E U G E N I A.

CHAPTER III.

MORTAL.

IT was a waltz of Waldteufel's that the band was playing now—"Chantilly"—with a solemn refrain like a hymn, passionate yet self-restrained as only dance music—music that has a "*must*" in it—can be. It was some weeks too since Eugenia had danced and she had in no wise fatigued herself during the day. The slight anxiety that was upon her seemed nothing serious or grounded when she reasoned about it to herself, and chance had just postponed for her a declaration which she rather dreaded. So that perhaps she had never been

in a more perfectly shaded mood for a dancing partner, be he who he might, and this dance she was dancing with the man she loved.

The statement that already, well within a century of hours, our glorious Eugenia was in love with this young fellow “of the baser sort,” is not the less likely because it is surprising, nor indeed, in most cases, is anything more probable than improbability. Ere she is floating round the room in his embrace, let us try and review the causes of her ecstasy.

“When we do love—we Carruthers”—Lady Shortlands had said, “we love with our whole being: it is like a madness . . . Eugenia is a true Carruthers;” and the conclusion from these premises must seem to be, that there would be no reason in Eugenia’s love. To do Lady Shortlands justice, she would never have insisted on her interview with Sir Edmund had she been aware that “the curse had come upon” her niece already.

What had happened may be best explained by metaphor upon this wise. Eugenia's heart was like a temple, full of blessing and prayers ; with noble impulses that spent themselves in noble ways—an army of acolytes—but with an unlit altar that stood before a shrine still veiled. On this altar the fuel had long lain cold, waiting for a spark to kindle it : and Eugenia dreamed that the fire must fall from heaven.

And, to be just, it is always from heaven that this kindling falls. Love is the awakening in our hearts of that self-consuming flame which is our breath of the divine : but the shrine before which we burn—whether it be pure or vile—the idol's feet round which the clear flame licks in sacrifice—whether they be gold or clay—that is partly our own wilfulness, be it allowed, and partly fate's.

No doubt it had been poor Sir Edmund whose words—and his manner far more than his words—had first unlocked to Eugenia's

consciousness this inner chamber of the heart. No doubt it was self-questioning on his behalf, prompted by Lady Shortlands' probe, that had made her feel the presence of this sacred altar, and this most sacred sacrifice of self upon the altar. But Eugenia was a woman, not a slave, she would be a priestess, not a Mænad, and her soul, surprised, looked for the shrine to be unveiled, “waiting in the midst of the temple.” We know how she had pondered, during the searching strains of Anne’s various music, and what it had asked her, when she first felt lit within her this flame, that always burns our best, while the veil was still drawn before the idol: “Is it he that should come?” she had questioned reverently, and almost with the voice of faith, “or do we look for another.”

But she had learned that Sir Edmund was not indeed the master of the holy place, feeling perhaps—if the phrase be not a strain upon the metaphor—that the flame had died before

him as round marble, when she would fain have set his image in the shrine.

Then of a sudden, when she was so thrilled with music, that it was as if the procession-march were sounding in her heart—only a German war-song, maybe, but translated to her listening soul by every fibre strained like temple harp-strings—, when the flame was fanned to such a glow that she could see by it, the veil was rent and her eyes had filled the shrine. She had looked up and seen Buck, standing by her, beneath the cedars — manly, masterful, passionate, real. The flames had felt a metal they could heat, responsive if not golden, the molten image was in the sanctuary once and for ever—for the worship and the passion is in the flame upon the altar and the fuel that feeds it, not in the shrine it lights or the idol it glorifies—and had she spoken with the voice of her heart, Eugenia must have said, “Mine eyes

have seen the king in his beauty." Passion deified and Love transfigured him, though he was only the leaden likeness of a man, with less of the true god's gold in him than any of his neighbours.

But the metaphor sounds over-strained—it is the metaphor of religion not of love. What shall we say? Sir Edmund's words had acted like Puck's love-philtre upon Titania:—

*"What thou seest when thou dost wake,
Do it for thy true love take!"*

That is nearer: But then Eugenia was not an unsubstantial fairy, but a woman.

Perhaps, to drop metaphor, and to try illustration by the more rational means of comparison, it may be said that Eugenia, whose nature had in it much of the honesty and singleheartedness that marks the women of Shakespeare—something of Imogen, something of Portia—loved Buck as Rosalind first

loved Orlando when he stood before her in his wrestling strength, and she—true woman as she was—would fain have stayed the wrestling.

How soon this love of Rosalind's leaped into life and upon what slight warrant !

“The little strength that I have I would it were with you.” she says, even before Orlando has proved his valiance, and afterwards, with such confession and such a rooted love as must say some plain word—not from forwardness but just to leave no question of allegiance :—

*“Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies !”*

One falls to wondering if it would in the least have mattered, had Orlando been beaten in that wrestling—would Rosalind have loved him less ? I think not ; he was not much of a man, remember, this Orlando. He was kindly to his servant and he “spoiled the trees”

with his verses: but that was in another country and another age. Now-a-days he would have idled at his club and tipped the waiter. He has no one immortal utterance like his Rosalind's own sigh:

“These burs are in my heart!”

or other utterances tenderer, wherein the heart so magically speaks that time seems to stand still when we see them in cold print before us. If his Rosalind had died, he would have pinned a sonnet over her grave; he would never have swooned at sight of her blood, else he could not have sent that kerchief dyed with his own, even to his “counterfeit mistress.”

Eugenia was like Rosalind—kind Rosalind, forgive us!—only the present is not all like the past, nor Ashbank quite Ardennes. One afternoon she had spoiled a scarf, for the sake of a young man in flannels—and been scolded for it. If she had been a stage heroine, she

would have taken off her necklace instead, after the tennis-match—that is to say, the wrestling—and, though her uncle would have banished her, no one in her audience would have blamed her for doing it. Yes: Rosalind's love held much of the same service, that Eugenia gave.

That word "*service*." Surely after all, for woman as for man, the truest love of all is the love that loves with *service*, be there prize or no. To rise up straight before the master, that is love. And the service, in its use, and the opportunities of the service, with these Time may perhaps have something to do, but the true love's birth is the work of a morning, of an hour, of a moment, of a glance. Under the cedars, of a summer's afternoon, it *was* not, and it *is*!

To say that Mr. Arthur John Jarvis had any notion how Eugenia's heart had leaped to life before him, would be—to give him as fine a

simile as may be—to credit the sun with the knowledge of his warmth and light upon the bosom of the fertile land ; or—for an opposite and truer image—to imagine that the central fires know anything about the beauty they beget, in forest, lawn and vale. He had not had Eugenia's preparation, and he had not Eugenia's spiritual sense, for any preparation that was his to work upon. He had eaten and drunk a great deal, and got some new clothes, and bade goodbye to some barmaids, at Portsmouth : and he had driven his friends over to Ashbank, "as fit as fleas," in his own parlance, to eat and drink a great deal more, and to air the new clothes, and to make love to anything pretty and accessible, of a better class than barmaids, that came in their way. Eugenia's beauty was of a sort that would have been more likely to awe than to attract him, had it not reached his intelligence—from something of that charged magnetism which such a pas-

sion as hers must convey—that her heart was heavy with tender care for him, that he could hurt or please her with his lightest word, that—as the world negatively puts it—she was “not indifferent to his society.”

To most men, this consciousness of a good woman’s whole solicitude would have been, in itself, a responsibility; but in this case, it told for Mr. Arthur Jarvis that he should be made of a coarser fibre than the common. The knowledge only rendered him more masterful. He wanted to test his own power, and meanwhile to share his prize with none. There was only one disqualification on his part, of which he was aware, in respect of Eugenia, and this he irritably expressed in the terms “that he wasn’t a Lord or a Sir” (with adjectives), but his social inferiority made him, not the less—but the more—exacting and insolent in his demands.

His mental attitude, during the dance, might

be put thus, in phraseology also all his own, (and with adjectives) “I’ll show these swells.” He was braced to exhibit his strength; prepared to relax into enjoyment of his triumph, by and bye, if he should be alone with Eugenia; —for tenderness was a commonplace to a man of Buck’s habits—but, for the moment, bent on flaunting it in the eye of the world: while she, feeling though she did, in her heart of hearts, that she wanted only, with him, the quiet of their fountain-side and the blessing of that starry night, was in her turn determined to seem at ease, and held her noble head erect and high.

Hitherto, the waltz had meant little or nothing to Eugenia. There had been men with whom she disliked to dance, because she disliked the men, others whose step had pleased her. She could not afford enough ball-dresses for romping, and she had not been out one half as much as many girls

some years her juniors. When she did go, the homage that her beauty invariably attracted had rather bored her than otherwise. To her healthful and untroubled senses, it had perhaps never occurred that the waltz was an embrace, prolonged in luxurious motion, and that the hand and the breath of a partner were the hand and the breath of a potential lover. But to-night, in this new phase of feeling that flooded all her life like light, the sudden thought that her beloved's arm must be about her, and her hand in his, that her heart must beat so near to his that his eyes could mark its trouble, was like the revelation to her of a danger which she hardly dared to run. Were it not for this pride that stayed her, she would have refused to dance at the last moment; and indeed, as she took his arm, she felt that she could trust herself to no further movement, without his guidance.

They passed along the corridor, quickly and

without speaking ; with each step the elasticity of Buck's walk became more electric, and as they came into the lit hall, just as the hymn-like notes of the refrain were swelling on the air, he passed his right arm round her waist and took her hand, drawing breath as he did so.

If it be possible to faint away and still keep colour and motion, Eugenia was in such a trance, during those first bars, while Buck and she adapted their steps to each other. But as they danced, her long and lovely slide taking its limit from his—and after all, if you are sound in wind and limb, you may get to dance as well in Clifton as in Canada—the glow of the exercise and the warmth of his grasp revived her into an enjoyment which awakened every nerve. There was not a turn in the dance, not a chord in the music, that did not seem to bring them closer together, to acquaint them with each other more and more. She

felt, as he did—"with a difference"—that the eyes of the room were upon her: she would *not* droop upon his shoulder, closely as he drew her to him; and her resistance added a charm to her movement and a vigour to his hold. Her thought was "if it might go on for ever! if it need never end"—she dreaded stopping, she would have to speak; while his was just about as much as this: "We can dance like one o'clock, and we'll show 'em how to step it."

"Unbearable of him?" Oh yes! but then he *was* unbearable; so "unbearable" that the full heart which leaned on his, went nigh to breaking from the mere oppression of his presence. The only thing more "unbearable" than this, would be the parting from him.

They danced on, as the floor filled—for the guests had come in, fast and furious, during those brief spaces of Eugenia's absence from the scene—not stopping their motion but retrenching or relaxing it, as the space

was less or more, two sanguine beings, facing fatigue as they might face the world and all its odds together, a beautiful pair not conscious of their beauty, not conscious of themselves, conscious only of each other. Each lived, for those minutes, only in the other's life.

At last, as the circling brought her a slight giddiness, and she could not but feel that her resistance would relax into too complete abandonment, Eugenia began, in her trance, to see sudden visions; each whirl showed her a fresh picture—the temple-steps in the summer rain, the cedar garden in the August sun, the stretch of meadow fields at Shortlands, the sea-line of Sussex, the King's Forest at Pisa;—and this young soldier in them all, and this delight. This was what she had missed! . . . She bowed her head as the music increased in power, and the tune became like a great thanksgiving of choral joy, then it changed and hurried—
Bang! Bang! Bang!

“Stop,” she said, not breathlessly but as one speaks in sleep, while, as Buck swung her from the slackening circle, she felt for one instant that the embrace was an embrace indeed, and then—then the waltz drew breath, and they leaned against the stairway for support.

Buck was more “blown” than Eugenia: and he did not speak at first, lest she should notice it: but he looked at her, and showed his square white teeth in a jolly smile; and she looked back at him, unwitting of the radiant longing in her glance—looked at him, he could not fail to feel, with indescribable affection, her eyes resting even on the slight glisten of the heat-drops on his sunburnt temples, by his thick curly hair.

“You are hot,” she said, “you have been dancing before—don’t tire yourself.”—It was with the same feeling towards care of him, which had prompted her to keep him from the rain in the garden.

“Not I!” said Buck, in the same tone with which he had answered there; he did not think of *her* in return: nor was there need, she could hardly have said that if she was tired or warm, she felt disembodied. Was it over indeed?

Not yet: after the pauses and the crashing chords, a last magical burst warned them that the end was approaching now. Without a word he stole his arm about her waist again, and drew her towards him—no resistance now.—Then one more course along the room, a few more hastening—slackening—whirls; a blare of brass, a sense of shock, like an awakening, which was only silence; and they were streaming out with the crowd, through the drawing-rooms, on to the terraces which overlooked a fairy scene of the enchanted garden-sward.

The bonds were broken: they were out of sight: what would he say? what would he do? He gave a sort of gulp—a laugh—

caught his breath hard, and said, “At least that beggar Trefusis couldn’t have swung you round like that!”

In the dewy night—so wonderful, with its clear vault of unastonished blue, against which the lanterns shone, like glow-worms, from the trees ; only changed, now and then, to sullen nearness of dark space, as the rockets and fireworks shot up at intervals from the shore and quenched the stars—Eugenia felt, despite the tenderness that overmastered all her thoughts, as if, for once in her life, she could speak to him clearly, unless the tears should stop her. They had been so near together, their very breath of life had seemed but one, could she not now say something of her say, though it would take eternity to say it all ?

“I wish,” she said, as they prepared to pace the paths all checked with shadowy light, “that you would not say things like that ; I wish you would not even think them !”

His look was not so much surprised as dogged: people had found fault with him, before, for want of feeling—but never in this tender way, as if his hardness bruised them.

“Well,” he said—and though she should have hated what he answered, the roughness of his boyish voice was very winning:—“I call it a rotten thing, that a shuffler like that should make up to *you*, and everybody push it on.”

“There are few people like Sir Edmund;” said Eugenia conscientiously.

“And thank my God for that,” said Buck.

Eugenia lifted up her lovely eyes towards the infinite spaces of the night, and her heart too thanked God;—not indeed because there were so few Sir Edmunds, rather because there was only one Buck. That worthy gazed his fill upon her upturned face, and, as she lowered her head, she caught his glance and smiled. A mother might have smiled some such a smile, on her admiring son.

But not quite such a smile; for its beauty made him press her arm against his side as no son would have pressed his mother's arm, and his voice was hoarser as, still looking full into her face, he said, "Let's go into some quiet place; away from all these people,"—he had first well assured himself that every one had seen him with Miss Brand, in their tour of the lamp-lit terrace.—"Let's go back to that summer-house," he said.

The "summer-house" was Mrs. Tomlinson's little Greek temple, where they had sheltered from the rain. "Shall we?" said Eugenia; "yes, if we can find our way."

They were each aware of a different pride in linking themselves by that one pronoun: their wish at all events, was one—to be away from all the world beside.

At the end of the terrace was a flight of steps, leading, through shrubberies, to the near end of that cypress alley, which they had

reached before from the cedar lawn. The gardens, on this side, were less brilliantly illuminated, for the household offices lay in this direction, and a big tent—unsightly but convenient—was set up here as a supper-room for the two bands; some women-servants were lingering round it, as they passed. It was the wrong side of the scene, but still the summer sky was over all and it was all alike an enchanted garden. While they were standing on the steps, Eugenia's grey-green dress dissolved her into the shadow of a statue, but Buck's dark clothes made him the more blackly visible against it; and, seeing him, some others of the White Highlanders ran out from the shadow of the trees, where they were evidently romping after their manner—engaged, as a matter of fact, in pelting each other with the small oil-lamps which hung in strings from the boughs.

“ Hallo, Buck, you sawney ! ” they called out.

“ Hold your noise,” said Buck rudely, rather fearful what they might say next.

“ Hallo!” (a rather sheepish “hallo” this time). “ We thought you were alone.”

“ I’m not alone then,” he replied with a grand air “—see you before you go.” And he marched down the steps with Eugenia, who could not have explained why she did not send him after them at once. As it was, she said nothing.

At the bottom of the steps, they found themselves alone. Looking back, they could see the other guests upon the terraces, moving like flies on a white window-sill. Here below, their surroundings looked larger and more real: but the laurels seemed asleep, and a veil of gossamer was laid in dew across the flower-beds, pale beneath moon and stars. The marble temple glimmered, like a ghost, beyond.

They went down to it; and to their surprise, they found that it was open and had shared

the transformation of the terraces. It had been cleared of gardeners' implements, though the earthy smell still clung to it a little. Its doors were set wide open, some rugs and easy-chairs had been placed within it, hiding the stone floor; it was lit with rose-glazed lamps, and in its centre, a perfume-fountain was tinkling and trickling into an old Greek vase, banked by a mass of flowers.

The walls were thick, like the walls of a vault; and as they entered, as if under a spell of silence, the doors closed-to behind them,—Buck having kicked away some Turkish mat that kept them open, only half by accident. They were heavy doors, and swung together with a clang, the pillars echoing the sound. High up, near the roof, there were oblong spaces fitted with glass, which did duty for windows, and through these, the deep blue of the sky was visible, spangled with stars. The pane of one was pushed aside; and the

warm air blew in, with a light whisper, and stirred the fountain and the flowers. All else was still. It was like some little chamber in an Arabian Night's story.

To Eugenia it seemed as if she had bodily entered that inner temple of the heart, which she had lately grown to know. She sat down, in utter content, surrendering herself to the impression of fatality that was upon her. "Let come what may!" she thought.

Buck was restless: he was a boy after all, despite his passions, and was astonished into exclamations that made her feel he was more at his ease with her than he had been.

"By George!" he said, "rather gassy, these flowers, you know. And the scent, *eau de cologne*; by gad! they're going it; give me your pocket handkerchief!"

She did so: he dipped it clumsily into the fountain and then wrung it out and gave it her. It was not *eau de cologne*, but some

much stronger essence in which he had steeped it—"chypre" or "stephanotis."

"Horrible!" said Eugenia, when she had smelt it, "I cannot endure scents."

Buck looked mortified, as she gave him her handkerchief again to air.

"E. B.," he said with a laugh; "it's got both our initials on—'Eugenia'—'Buck':—rather nice, eh?" Then he took her fan which had been lying with her handkerchief upon her lap, and began to fan her, spreading the handkerchief on the Greek vase to dry, and leaning against it.

As she too leaned forward, to meet the current of the air he fanned, his quick eyes looking down upon her beauty, saw the leaves of a poor tumbled cabbage-rosebud in the lace trimming of her dress, near the left shoulder.

"I don't think much of your flowers," he said in an altered voice, laughing no longer.

"I have *no* flowers on, you mean," said Eugenia smiling—she had forgotten in the

presence of the giver, that she had placed his rosebud near her heart—"but this bracken is beautiful," she added, feeling herself bolder, "although you may not think so."

"Oh! I know that," said Buck, "the ferns ain't bad : tasty and all the rest of it. I'm up to that. I know when a thing's tasty, as well as any other chap—though I'm not lame,—but I mean the rosebud you've got there."

She followed his hand, with her eyes ; and saw the roseleaves showing in her tucker. She turned hot and then cold, she was confused into a stupid silence.

"I suppose you let *him* give it you," he said, "that looks as if you understood each other pretty well ;"—and then, beside himself with anger, he shut the fan with a snap, and threw it on her lap again. "I think," he said brutally, "that, when you let a chap give you a rotten flower—just the sort of thing a seedy, sneaking chap like that would do, instead of saying

something open—you ought, at least, to fire up a bit, when you hear another chap—that *is* a chap—abuse him ; and not lead the other chap on till he's almost out of his mind, and thinking all the time that perhaps you didn't hate the sight of him, when I suppose you do. It's just like a woman," he went on, forgetting himself altogether, "and a damned flirt into the bargain!"

Eugenia started as if he had stung her ; and the walls went round before her ; but there was a smile waiting under her pride.

" Oh ! hush :" she said, putting her hand gently to the roseleaves, " Sir Edmund did not give me this flower." She hesitated, and then, with a burning flush of shame, the smile came like a glory. " *You threw it me, yourself,*" she said, " *this morning:*"

She tried to look at him, but she could not ; she tried to hide her face but her hands were powerless ; she tried to get up out of the low

chair into which she had sunk, but her limbs refused their office ; and he was bending over her, as one bends over a rose, to draw its heart out with one's breath : he had found her secret ; *her* secret ? was it not his ? Whatever depth of feeling, whatever fervour of young blood was in him, her words had stirred ; his full lips grew dry, his ears and temples red, his trembling hand sought hers—“ Do you care for me ? ” he said, in a rough low tone : “ do you love me ? ”

Now that the moment was come, that he too had plunged into the lava-tide which was steeping all her senses—that they were both in the same wave—she felt, to her own amazement, that she could speak in resolute clear words, though her voice sounded like another's voice :

“ Oh ! I think so,” she said gently, “ I think I love you.”

He bent down before her on his knees, he would not have her rise : he clasped his strong

young arms about her, and drew her forward, and with his lips he kissed her shoulder on the place where the roseleaves lay. As he kissed her, her cheek was on his brow, she felt his thick cropped hair brushing her lips, her head drooped upon his : “ My love,” she said in her own voice at last, but with a break in it, “ my love ! ”

Her tone made him ashamed, he did not want her to speak ; he raised his head quickly, and tightening his grasp of her, he laid his mouth to hers. If it could speak no spoken language but his own—and scarcely that—it spoke love’s silent language eloquently well.

Perhaps with the exception of her mother’s pure “ good night,” and Lady Shortlands’ occasional butterfly touch, no kiss had rested on Eugenia’s lips, since she was full grown, and had done with her girl-friends’ admiring and affectionate salutes. No man had ever kissed her ; and she was one of those rare

women to whom a kiss is the consecration, if not of a man's whole self, at least of all that it is theirs to give. In that first kiss, she gave her lover all herself; and his mouth had sufficient fervour to make her believe that there was nothing of himself he did not give, for he had not kissed only his mother—and he had no sisters.

To describe what Eugenia went through would be to no purpose: most students of her record are doubtless far too well acclimatised to such experiences to be able to understand it. She felt that her whole life was in the kiss: body and soul beat there. And Buck was living in that moment too; but then Buck could give himself over and over again, if he was generous, he was also abundant. She could count the pulse in his lips, which beat in great slow throbs to lose itself in a flutter of coursing blood, and so tremble back to calm. Her own lips were

growing dry and clung to his, but her eyes were blind with tears : “Oh,” she said, “love, is it well that I should love you? is it the best?”

“Best,” he said with a sort of sob, a little shifting his position, to be more at his ease, and laying his curly head upon her shoulder, which his rough cheek bruised almost to pain, “what could be better than this? Kiss me—kiss me again!” Once more she laid her lips to his. “You are cold,” he said impatiently, but her eyes answered him. “Say something”—he whispered at last, “say you love me! say you don’t let other fellows do this?”

To Eugenia, in her single-hearted faith, the question seemed as if it could not be asked in earnest; she was happy with a happiness to which she had a better right than Juliet. “No man has ever kissed me,” she said gently, a rose-leaf flush staining her flower-soft cheeks anew.

“By George,” he said, feeling at last his

mastery, over her sense, to be complete; “you’ve come to the right chap for it now.”

Her blush changed itself a little, and she shrank from him: but all the while she felt, with her divine woman’s instinct, What did his words matter? was he not hers? was not his imperfect speech *her* failing, now, as well as his?

“Dear love,” she said again, and then “poor love!”

She did not know why she said “poor love,” or why her eyes were wet; she did not yet know how full her love was of self-sacrifice and pity. As for Buck, so long as his head lay upon her shoulder, he did not much care what she said; his critical taste in speech was not sharpened by this passionate joy; his senses were all molten into one—delight. . . .

Then of a sudden, as breath and words failed them, like the voice of a bird against their whispers—pure and true—a clear voice

broke the still and sultry air, singing, outside the little temple in the balmy night, some passionate French verse in a pleading minor key. The lines were short and swift, and there was a *nonchalant* ring in the Spanish music. It was Anne Jefferies' voice, and she sang—her fine accent cutting the air, like the cool drip of rain :—

*“L'air est embaumé,
La nuit est sereine,
Apaise ma peine !
Viens ! O bien-aimé,
C'est l'heure d'amour . . . c'est l'heure.” . . .*

“C'est l'heure d'amour : c'est l'heure !” The words spoke for Eugenia in their music, there seemed to her nothing strange in their sound :—but naturally, as they spoke in French, they were not intelligible to Mr. Arthur Jarvis.

“Who the devil is it ?” he muttered, “there's some one outside.”

He got up quickly and faced her in the rosy light : she stood too, for her hand seemed one

with his, and they gazed at each other. His short hair was rough, his face was bloused and red—he looked almost as if he had been crying—his white necktie was rumpled and pushed round his collar, his heart was beating violently—its thuds marked the time of Anne's swift singing—he looked rather a beast, more drunk than sober.

But Eugenia looked like Pygmalion's statue, turned to woman. Her lips were parted, and the blood was coming back to them, where his had pressed it away; her eyes were soft and lustrous, there was a new light of loveliness about her face.

That is what a kiss can do—intensify one's nature. It had brought out the satyr in the man and the angel in the woman; it had made him restless, fierce with swollen and fiery veins; it had made her ready if need were, to face death, like a martyr, for his sake.

They stood fronting each other, for some

seconds, and listened to the *piquante* voice, as it stole in through the open pane from outside. Yes: it was Anne Jefferies singing, as she stood between the pillars that had sheltered Eugenia from the shower; but, when she ceased, it was Dick Crossley's barytone that said; "Charming!" and a slow smile stole over Buck's features as he recognised it.—

"He's an artful dog!" he said, "but I pity his taste." And he let his eyes wander over Eugenia's beauty.

"Oh yes!" said Anne, mimicking Crossley's voice, "'Charming!' that's all you know about it; you don't know what it is, nor what it means,—or else you'd be angry with me for so much as *frédonnant* the air, without its delicious accompaniment. But Massenet's something quite out of your depths—and right over your head. You know you don't really care for it two straws."

"Oh! yes, I assure you I do;" said Crossley,

in a deprecating way, a little put out at her extreme frankness. ("He doesn't like that, you know"—Buck explained to Eugenia, in a confidential whisper).

"Very well then, you do?" said Anne carelessly, "'*Parlons d'autre chose!*' Looks pretty, doesn't it, this temple? see! there's a light inside."

"Oh, yes! Boville proposed that it should be furnished as a flirtation corner."

"We will go into the *sanctum sanctorum*, Mr. Crossley, and I will give you a lesson—Oh no! not in flirtation, you're too young for that—but in singing!"

("By George!" said Buck, "that was a nasty one for him!")

"The door is shut," said Crossley.

"Push it, stupid!" returned Anne, "they can't have locked themselves in, you know, whoever it is that's there—you're as alarmed as if it were 'Ninny's tomb.'"

“Open the door, it is Miss Jefferies,” said Eugenia simply to Buck.

He hesitated, half in disappointment and half in anger; and then sulkily pulled back the heavy door. There, sure enough, were Anne Jefferies and Crossley upon the step.

When she saw Buck, Anne gave a little whistle.

“Good gracious!” she said, “Why it *was* ‘Ninny’s tomb!’” at which sally, Crossley went off into a roar of laughter. Then she looked at Eugenia, and the transformation in her aspect did not escape Anne’s falcon eyes.—She saw, at once, that there had been some understanding between the two, and she had formed a sufficient estimate of Eugenia’s nature, to feel sure that, whatever it was, it was serious as far as she, at least, was concerned.

“Hallo!” said Crossley.

“Hallo!” said Buck. Having been listening,

he was naturally the less surprised, and he managed to put a vulgar inflection into his echo, which shifted the larger half of the oddness in the meeting, upon Crossley and Anne Jefferies. Under this master stroke Eugenia too recovered herself a little.

“Did you dance that waltz?” she said to Anne.

“No I didn’t,” said Anne, “I was absorbed in watching you and Mr. Jarvis—the poetry of motion!—but I danced the next, and the next; and then persuaded this shy son of Mars to air his temporary Venus out of doors.—Poor Mr. Crossley, I have been upsetting his theories on so many subjects—music for one!—and we broke in here, with the honest intention of going through our *solfeggi*—‘bay-ing the moon’—I would have ‘roared him gently as any sucking dove.’ . . . Oh! you don’t know how I’ve studied Shakespeare, since I’ve heard Sir Edmund quote. I think

he's such a clever man—Shakespeare I mean, of course," . . . she rattled on.

Eugenia felt that it was kind of Anne to cover the awkwardness of the pause; but, for her part, she had no feeling of shame: she was only sorry that her interview with Buck had been disturbed. The whole world was welcome to know of her happiness, from the first moment of its birth—except perhaps Sir Edmund. . . . She had not thought of poor Sir Edmund! It seemed hard that Anne should just have chanced upon his name. Eugenia felt that she would not like *him* to hear of this from Anne; she would like to tell him all about it, in some gentle way, herself. She had never given him a moment's right to hope that her happiness would be otherwise built.

Buck managed to turn the laugh entirely against Crossley, when once Anne Jefferies had brought his musical pursuits to the fore.

He always thought that music and its study were ridiculous—one of his favourite jokes was to give a “view halloo” when Crossley was practising his exercises, after his small lights, in barracks.

“Wish you joy of your lesson, old man!” he said, pushing by Crossley, “*We* are going down to the shore.”

Anne could not restrain herself from making a little *move* over his impertinence and Eugenia’s infatuation.

“Are you really going down to the shore?” she asked.

“If he wishes it,” said Eugenia, with a whole world of sweet surrender in her tone.

Anne turned impatiently away.

“Our turn for this chamber of horrors, now, Mr. Crossley,” she said sharply, handing Eugenia her scent-drenched handkerchief, and rearranging the flowers a little, where Buck’s coat-tails had crushed them, “Good-bye, Miss

Brand ! I mean to put this young gentleman through his paces."

Eugenia smiled : she was as one that walks in sleep. She drifted out of the temple leaning upon Buck's arm, and they passed dreamily onwards, down the cypress-alley towards the plateau of cedars ; beyond which, far down, they knew, lay the Hard and the shining sea.

Anne was so indignant that she banged the door to, after them, and having really made up her mind to speak to Crossley about his good voice and his bad singing, she set to work to vent her spleen upon him. Perhaps she gave him a stricter lesson than she would have done, had she not been put out of temper by Eugenia's "folly," but he was a well-meaning young fellow and felt the force of her authority upon music, which, like a clever woman, she managed to soften to his vanity. The one good resultant from

Eugenia's first kiss was perhaps Crossley's better singing.

But Eugenia and her lover wandered out again into the wonderful night—and such a night for sweethearts, with such a breath of sleeping flowers and such a glory from the waking moon—wandered out, closely linked together, in their strength and their beauty and their love. And to both, the world was fair, and to one it was all new; and to both the hour was happy, and to one it was heaven. They wandered on, and they did not speak, only his arm was round her now, and his hot cheek against her forehead; and from the hall, high up, the bursts of measured music, as they changed or ceased, were all that warned them of the flight of time. Down a winding dingle they strolled on together; which led them to the shore at last. The walk was bordered with shrubs and flowers, and overarched with honeysuckle and woodbine and vine. There

were “roses, roses all the way :” the air was charged with their delicious perfume. Amid the roses and beneath the roses, the lovers followed the gleaming path, till they reached a little rough terrace, projecting slantwise, like a breakwater, into the sea—the lowest terrace of all—against which the waves lapped silently, without break and without recall, for the tide was high.

Here at last they were alone, for the few full-moon moments of their life.

For oh ! there comes in all lives, some one hour up to which the rest have led—some high-tide beyond which all is really ebb. When it is ours, we do not always know it ; the flow has been so gradual that we have not looked back or forward ; but we know it when it is past. This was Eugenia’s hour :

“It was the hour for angels ! There stood hers.”

—A very tangible and mortal angel, that

young lieutenant of the White Highlanders.—No room could have held her joy, half so well as this open vault of the sky, no surroundings else could ever have been half so eloquent as the leaves and tendrils of the ivy and the blossoming vines, and the sighing waves against the wall where she leaned with her first lover.

And in Buck's young soldier life — for his adventures had been rather in the grove than in the camp—there had been many tides, but none like this. He had never yet been really loved; and this was his own first moment of pure affection. In this love that was lavished upon him, was the ideal mother's love which he had never recognised, the ideal sister's love which he had never known, the ideal wife's love which was as yet a mystery. And in return, this triple love drew forth from him something between the loves of son and brother and husband—his first fruits of devotion,

trust and possession—the perfect lover's love. It was only a reflection and it would pass away :

“More frail than the shadows on glasses,”

but at that moment his heart held it, and it was his to give.

“I think I must have loved you from the very first moment;” Eugenia said at last : “for everything is different, since you are come. You have been all my life since then, and I have had no thought you have not filled.”

“Darling,”—he said, as he pressed closer against her, and wondered how it was that he had never seen how beautiful she was. His words were few, but his eyes and his voice spoke for him.

“Poor love,” she said again, putting her white arms round his neck, and twisting her soft fingers in his hair—his head was hot and daubed with *brillantine*.—She looked at her fingers and smiled; a love, as great

as hers, transfigures even what is mean and coarse.

“Arthur,” she said presently, “I think you will be Arthur to me always. King Arthur, and not Buck—but I shall love you by all names,” she said, and the rare smile came again.

“*I shall always call you Jinny!*” he whispered with a kiss.

Alas! Eugenia, had it come to this, that you could hear your beautiful name thus garbled and not shudder? Even so. “For what,” she would have reasoned, “could it matter, so long as he called her his?” And just now, she did not reason: but as the lapping waves spread out their whole full flood beneath the moon, so her heart’s deep waters widened under the moon-cold brilliance of his love. It was night with Eugenia’s reason.

High-tide, full-moon, and night!—

At that moment, they heard a quick foot-step, crunching the gravel of the steep path;

not the step of an aimless wanderer, but rather of a busy seeker careful to make his coming heard. It was Crossley, in good-natured quest of them, for it was midnight, and supper was served.

“Sir Edmund Trefusis is to take you to supper, Miss Brand,” he said, “and he is waiting: Lady Shortlands has sat down already, and your places are kept near her.”

There was a tinge of laughing sarcasm in his pleasant tone, which seemed to say “You are in for it, and you had better come at once”—

Buck looked at Eugenia. “Do you want any supper?” he said: he rather feared that she would say she did not. Because he did; love gave him an appetite.

“You do;” said Eugenia, “and besides, I must not disobey my aunt” she stopped as she remembered what obedience to her aunt implied.

“Oh! mustn’t you, though?” said Buck,

"we two are going in to supper together; and if we see any lame beggar lurking about the hall, I'll break every bone in his miserable corpse that's not broken beforehand."

What could Eugenia do but assent to such mastery as this, at its first command?

So they walked, without hurry, up to the house together, Crossley following behind, in a state of wonder, bordering on awe, at Eugenia's infatuation,—("Was it possible that Buck Jarvis was such a *very* swagger man after all?")—Eugenia still in her trance of delight, and Buck in all his glory.

The lighted house seemed changed, when they entered it again, in the momentary silence and desertion of the dancing-hall, for Mrs. Tomlinson's supper was a very dinner in its formality and order, and her guests had been collected as for a solemn rite. Outside they heard the shrill laugh of the kitchen-maids mixed with the deeper voices of men, in and

about the tent where the bands were supping. One girl indeed passed them, crossing the terrace on a soldier's arm, and made Eugenia feel, with a thrill, what likeness there was, all the world over, in this new happy madness.

They entered by the drawing-room windows, and crossed the empty hall, which nearly gave on the great dining-room, where the feast was spread. The guests did not exceed two hundred, and the resources of Ashbank were almost inexhaustible for a “sit-down supper.”

There were two doors to the room, one at either end. Crossley left his truants, and entered through the lower door, near to which, at the further end of the longest table, sat the maiden who awaited his companionship ; but at Crossley's bidding, Eugenia—after a furtive glance, in vain, for Sir Edmund's listless figure in the alcove—passed through the upper door with her companion. She had just time to see Sir Edmund, seated at a side table with Anne

Jefferies, and to be as struck with the intelligence and kindness of his look as he was with the extraordinary beauty of her radiant pallor as she came in from the night air; then she was aware that, at the most distinguished table, two places were left vacant, exactly facing Lady Shortlands and her host.

Eugenia hesitated: it was a difficult moment; but Buck—upon the spur of it—was determined to make it a decisive moment too; and, with Eugenia still upon his arm, he marched straight up to the two empty seats—one of which was really destined for her, but neither indeed for him!

What with the dazzle of the room, and the noise of the talking, and the rush of the serving, Eugenia never rightly knew what happened next; but Sir Edmund knew. He saw her come in with Buck and, after an instant's hesitation, take her place opposite to Lady Shortlands. Then he experienced that curious

sensation which a sympathetic person sometimes feels—that some one else in the room was undergoing a critical—even an agonised—state of mind. He held his breath, and the next thing of which he was sensible was the quick rising of Dr. Burroughes from his place, a few seats from Anne Jefferies, and his hurrying to the table where Lady Shortlands sat, with an urgent call for space and air.

Then the crowd made way: and he saw the old lady—her rouge glaring, like a clown's, upon the drawn and awful whiteness of her haggard face—fall to one side on Mr. Tomlinson's shoulder: her glassy eyeballs riveted upon her niece, and her set lips vainly striving after some inarticulate word of rage.

“Lady Shortlands has—fainted;” said Anne, trying to combat her own ghastly impression.

“It is not fainting,” said Sir Edmund, in his prescience, “it is death.”

CHAPTER IV.

ASPECT.

WHEN Sir Edmund Trefusis had said of Lady Shortlands' terrible collapse that it was death, he was not literally right, but he was not actually wrong: for some minutes it did indeed seem as if life had wholly forsaken her, and the wretched painted husk of her body would know the bitter kernel of her soul no more. But, owing perhaps as much to her natural vitality as to Dr. Burroughes' promptly-taken means for her recovery, she fought her way back to consciousness at last, when she had been carried up to her own rooms. So that nothing tragic was made of the circumstance, when the first moment of alarm was past; the explanation which had occurred to Anne

Jefferies was accepted, the servants replied to all enquiries that "her ladyship had fainted," and the festivities were at an end for no one, except old Lord Shortlands, who was half beside himself with senile care, and Eugenia who at once took up the burden of nursing her aunt. Lady Shortlands was a stranger to most of the company, and it was easy for Mrs. Tomlinson, who cared too little, for anything, to be violently moved—unless by an earthquake or the snub of a Duchess—to dispel whatever anxiety the horror of the sight had occasioned; for it was Lord Shortlands' special request, as soon as ever Dr. Burroughes decided that the immediate danger was passed, that there should be no alteration made in the hour when the carriages were ordered.

When Parfitt had pulled the old lady to pieces and got her into bed, and Dr. Burroughes had pronounced upon her malady,

which—thanks to Sir Edmund's prevision—there was no need for him to diagnose, Eugenia took her seat at her aunt's bedside, with no more part or lot in the ball than if it had never been.

As she sat there, opposite to Dr. Burroughes, she could hear Parfitt's monotoned voice as she enlisted the sympathies of Sir Edmund's valet—who as an expert in muscular rheumatism considered himself entitled to an opinion upon apoplectic paralysis—in the dressing-room; while Sir Edmund himself remained with Lord Shortlands in the boudoir, so full of trivial evidences of its late occupant—her scent-bottles and drugs, her hand-mirrors and tattling journals.

The quiet apartments, over which hovered such an awful shadow, presented a wonderful contrast to the supper room in its triumph of decoration, ringing with two hundred merry voices, and the rattle of glass and plate.

Nothing here was altered ; and the two watchers by the bedside had only one drawn, voiceless face to contemplate.

When Sir Edmund had first detailed to him Lady Shortlands' symptoms, Dr. Burroughes had been amply prepared for the occurrence of such a seizure as had overtaken her ; but his own judgment of her state, when he had seen her at luncheon, had reassured him considerably. And in the evening, despite her vacancy and wandering thoughts, Lady Shortlands had been in good trim. She had endured the fatigue of dressing, and she had got away from the whirl and tumult of the dancing-hall, to be at least as quiet in the library, with Mr. Vane, as she would have been on one of her customary evenings at home. For that night, he had thought, there need be nothing to fear ; for the supper-room, despite its brilliancy and noise, held nothing likely to disquiet or excite one so used to

such a scene as Lady Shortlands. Something, therefore—he was fain to conclude—must have brought her a shock to cause this pressure on the brain—what was it? What possible reason had there been for anger or alarm? He had himself seen none, though he had watched his patient carefully.—She had eaten little and drunk nothing; nor could he find a cause why from a state of calm, she should be suddenly convulsed with passion.

Dr. Burroughes pondered what link there might be between cause and effect: and meanwhile he looked at Eugenia. What was it?

Eugenia knew what it was: she was quite aware that it was the sight of herself, entering the supper-room with Arthur Jarvis, after their long delay—and then only in obedience to a messenger—which had stricken Lady Shortlands with this sudden shock. Her conversation of the morning with her aunt left her no

doubt that the aspect of the pair, and its significance, had not escaped her. Whether it had called up bygone memories or not, Lady Shortlands had not been blind to what had fallen upon them; and Eugenia felt that she alone was to blame for this accident—this . . . further or more definite conclusions she did not dare to hazard, for she knew that she must maintain her coolness, and that it ought to be difficult for her to do so, that she ought not yet to be able to think things over and consider consequences. But, all the same, she could. Her own coldness amazed and grieved her. It seemed almost criminal.

If, before this new-found passion had possessed her life, Lady Shortlands had been taken ill, Eugenia would have been troubled and anxious: now, to her disgust, she was neither: this second occurrence had brought back her senses to their balance, and, as she took her place opposite to Dr. Burroughes,

she found herself pinching her own round white arm to make certain that she was not a creature of stone or a woman in a dream.

Naturally there was no trace of fatigue upon Eugenia. Never had she been to a ball for less physical exercise, and had she gone to her own room now, she would not any way have slept for hours. She had to-night appropriated a second self in all its added strength. There was a double vigour in her heart, a stronger pulse along her veins.

Dr. Burroughes looked at her in admiration. He was rather tired himself from his journey and the change to soft sea-air and dissipation —both alike unusual in his London-bounded and methodic life. And he had seen Eugenia active and helpful in the preparations for the dance, he had watched her supple movement in the waltz, he had noticed her indifference to draughts and sudden change of temperature—he did not know this double

strength, this bounding heart that stayed her—and he marvelled. She sat facing him in her simple grey-green dress, on which the bracken drooped a little, her white arms lying in her lap—idle but capable—her breathing calm beneath the living alabaster of her throat. She was like a carven image of Silence.

Had nothing happened to Lady Shortlands, had the ball ended just as balls are wont to end and the guests dispersed as usual, she would not have been so calm: in her own room, and unfatigued, she would have had leisure to give way before the whelming tide of this new consciousness. But now, just at its height, it was brought face to face with a fresh tide that checked it. Between the magnetism of the opposite surprises, her heart beat evenly: she had no moment left her in which to give way; the time of her surrender to emotions was not yet come.

She was perfectly still, and Dr. Burroughes

could not help thinking that she wore the aspect of a person at a funeral, who is neither glad nor sorry and only very reverent of mien, willing neither to discourage nor dispel the grief of others. Eugenia was unconscious alike of his survey and his thoughts: she was not absent, but she was numbed; and her attitude did not change. She leaned slightly forward, towards Lady Shortlands, whose vacant eyes kept wandering over her; but her own fair eyes were still less seeing than her aunt's, though they were wide open and attentive. Her exquisite eyebrows were a little raised, her lips were parted, and even her teeth were not fast shut. An ugly woman would have worn this look with double ugliness, but it doubled Eugenia's beauty. Her soul, which was always acting as a screen for her features when she was conscious of people watching her, was far away in the cypress-grove or on the seaweedy shore:—only her breathing

body sat opposite the doctor, in its careless loveliness, and defied him.

Not that she was slow, or stupid: presently, to test her, he softly made as if he wished a curtain pulled aside to let the lamplight fall, for a moment, on Lady Shortlands' face. She had obeyed him almost before his sign was made; and an instant afterwards, perceiving that the flare troubled the patient, she had replaced it. So that he was convinced she was intelligent and would make a good nurse, but still he longed to shake her—to rouse her, by some means, to a glimpse of fear or care. He dared not do so on the ground of Lady Shortlands' danger, as he was not yet certain how far her faculties were in abeyance; and so—imagining Eugenia, from her superb unconcern, to be a selfish person,—he tried to do so on her own behalf.

“Excuse me,” he said, “but you will take cold, sitting still in your ball-dress.”

She glanced at her own shoulders: "I will ask Parfitt for a shawl, when she comes back," she said: and then—after a pause, as if she had forgotten—"thank you."

She had answered readily and sensibly, without a fraction of change in her demeanour. Most women, Dr. Burroughes felt, would have said too much. They would have said they "really did not feel cold," (as if it mattered,) and have shrugged their white shoulders higher, in mock hardihood; or else they would have made his suggestion an excuse to go and change their dress and don a "*peignoir*," or a "tea-gown," or some other nondescript, selected for his final subjugation. Eugenia's answer pleased him, and he was sure that, if he had given her a blanket to put over her shoulders, she would have wrapped it round her, with no questions and no airs, and without even casting a glance at her reflection in the glass.

But her tone moved him. It was not

wholly sad, but just pre-occupied. An attentive nurse in an hospital might have answered him so, by a patient's bedside, when she had some more dangerous case on hand, in her own family at home, which she had been forced to leave at his behest. Nor was it otherwise indeed. The truth was, that, without her knowing it, there was a balance being weighed in Eugenia's heart between this practically dead old woman and her living love. Here was a piece of time-worn age, given straight into her hands to soothe and smooth, making demands on all her patience and on all her skill: but at the self-same moment, she found thrust upon her another care, the passion of a young and wilful human heart, that made demands upon her body and her soul. Which was the heavier responsibility? Kindness and human charity spoke for the old woman's tending, but the unquenchable voice of the heart for the

young man's love: "Oh, if this should part us—if this should part us!"—

Meanwhile, she felt only indignant that her aunt's illness did not move her as it should have done. "I am a wretch," she found herself thinking, over and over again, as her mind returned to the scene before her, after long journeyings in the immediate past; "what can be done to me to make me feel alive?"

The light was on a table near her, and shone full upon her face, as Dr. Burroughes watched her; she puzzled him and yet he could not think that she was heartless. When you had done looking at Eugenia's formal beauty, you discovered that the chief charm in her face was its natural expression of her two strongest traits; its declaration that she was most trustworthy and most loveable. And, to-night, her initiation into Love's first secret had increased these traits. No: she was not heartless.

They sat on in silence; the image of another

man was so completely filling Eugenia's thoughts and her mental vision, that she never once glanced at Dr. Burroughes, though he found his own gaze resting upon her, much more often and much more contentedly than upon his patient.

After some minutes, Parfitt came, in ostentatious hush, and put her face, which was awake with curiosity, close to Eugenia's ear.

"One of the gentlemen wishes to speak to you outside, upon the lobby, Miss Brand," she said.

Eugenia looked at Dr. Burroughes; he motioned to her that she might go.

"It is Sir Edmund Trefusis," she thought, not without some relief that he could not now speak to her of marriage, at any rate. But Sir Edmund was with Lord Shortlands in the boudoir; and Parfitt, who was nothing if not *intrigante* and who had a half-sovereign in her hand, led her straight into the corridor, by the bedroom door.

As she passed out, she became aware of the presence of her lover, by a whiff of cigar smoke and brandy. Buck was standing a few paces from her, looking extremely sheepish and very sleepy; with his bedroom candlestick in his hand, throwing its light upon his rough square chin. He held the candle to her face, as Parfitt left them, and looked at her possessively; then he put his arm round her and kissed her, without a word. It was impossible to tell the sense of comfort that his presence brought her: but as she looked at him her heart grew troubled. Eugenia was not used to seeing young men after a hard night's dancing and a heavy supper, 'with a B. and S. and a cigar, in the smoking-room, to top up.' She thought his eyes were glazed, and his face flushed; she feared he was anxious and tired.

"Dear," she said, "how nice of you to come and say 'good-night' to me;—or rather 'good-

morning,'" she added, with a divine tenderness in her tone.

"How's the old girl?" said Buck, going direct to the point.

"Dr. Burroughes says that we must wait and watch;" said Eugenia, with the old reproachful smile, "he seems to know all about her."

"And you're going to sit up all night with him and Trefusis, eh? turn and turn about, I suppose," he said resentfully.

"Parfitt is there," said Eugenia.

"Well," said Buck in a low voice, with something of jealousy, in his manner, and something of appropriation, laying his hand upon her shoulder; "get a coat or a jacket, at all events."

Eugenia shrank a little, for his touch was something quite unknown to her: "I will fetch one," she said as she disengaged herself from his embrace.

“No: stop a bit,” said Buck.

He kicked off his pumps, with a moment’s self-congratulation on his embroidered socks, put down the candle and was off along the velvet carpet of the corridor, in silent and light-footed haste.

While he was gone, Eugenia stooped and put his shoes ready for him again.

He came back, in a minute; bringing in his hand a gaudy satin smoking-jacket—an acquisition of three days before—which he had worn for but one hour himself, just long enough to give it a faint suggestion of smoke. It was worked in his regimental colours, and with a smart monogram, devised by his hosier’s daughter to suit his own loud taste.

Eugenia could not resist the pleasure of pleasing him, and she let him put it round her—her white satin-smooth arms gliding into the loose satin-lined sleeves without touching

them. He wrapped the big fronts across her chest, and there she stood in his own coat—his very own, with his name and his colours upon her—the vulgar silks in charming contrast to her proud distinguished head. It was only vanity that had made him get it—it registered her as his property,—but she did not know that.

Eugenia could not flirt; but the warmth of his hands, and the quilted jacket, made her blush, and her eyes, as she looked at him, were irresistibly lovely. He took her in his arms and fairly hugged her, with a boy's passionate admiration.

“Now go and sleep,” she said,—“sleep well! dear love, you look hot and tired.”

“Oh! I’m all right,” he said, “I sleep like a top wherever I am: now, look here Jinny, if you want anything, you know my door—”

Eugenia drew herself up a little, but he went

on :—“ It’s the one just off the big staircase, on the far side, opposite to that room upon the landing.”

“ That is my room,” said Eugenia.

“ Is it ? ” said Buck, his grey eyes looking blue with love and pleasure : “ Well, I shall stay up :—don’t be afraid.—I’ll leave my door a bit open, and if there’s any difficulty in holding the old woman down, and you want a lively chap to sit on her head, or do any trifle of that sort, in the way of sick-nursing, I’m your man. You’ll only have to come softly to the top of the stairs, and say ‘ Buckie ! ’ ”

“ And you will hear me ? ” said Eugenia : the whispered way in which he said his own pet name affected her strangely.

“ Well, if I don’t at first,” he said, ruefully, —“ for I sleep deuced heavy after a ball,—there’s my big sponge in the bath by the door, and I shall wake jolly soon if you heave that :

only if you do, I advise you to get sharp out of the room, or else you'll hear a tidy swear, and get it back at your head!"

"Hush!" she said, for his voice, though low, was thick and loud; "I shall not need you, dear." She pushed him gently from her, but her touch attracted him the more.

"Come to the end of the passage!" he said in a still lower voice, his pleading tone more sweet than music to her infatuated ears. She walked with him to the top of the great staircase, her gauze dress making no rustle as she went.

How dark it was in the vast hall and on the stairs! The lamps were out: only the faint streaks of the dawning light left a little colour in the painted window, and touched the suits of armour into steel and silver. All was ghostly and calm and still. On the further side of the gallery, they could see the white door of Buck's room, the first in the bachelors'

wing. To their left, were the three steps leading to Eugenia's chamber.

"Is that your door?" said Buck.

"Yes," said Eugenia.

He put his arm through hers, while his keen eyes searched her face: then she felt that she was trembling. She had not feared to see death, but she feared love.

"Go, now," she said quickly; "go to your little room, my love, and leave me," and then, the caress in her voice overmastering the fear, "O Arthur!" she said; "do you love me? is it *possible*—is it true?"

"' Possible?—true?'" he answered, taking her in his arms one more good time, and racking his not over-well stored brain for some brave oath of love—sun, moon and stars, which were good enough for Romeo, being outworn and stale for such a bran-new lover as Buck—"if *I don't love you, Jinny, I'm a Dutchman!*"

And so, with that most incontrovertible affir-

mation on his lips, and with one last long-drawn kiss that must have made the spirits of dead knights come back into their armour with longing, they said “Good-night”—and parted.

Eugenia stood and watched the man she loved, as he stole down the stairs, and up the further flight, and along the gallery to his room: the summer nights are never wholly dark, and the corridor was straight, she needed no light for her return. Then it occurred to her that she would go to her own room and take off the smoking-jacket, she dared not risk its meeting Lady Shortlands’ waking eyes.

But when she got into her own room, she could not take it off her, it was too real a sign of his beloved existence. She felt for her long dark travelling cloak, plain like all her wardrobe, and put it on, over the gaudy jacket, which it quite concealed. And in the new-found weakness of her love, she felt as if his arms were round her still.

She stood for a few seconds motionless, the while her heart sent up some half-formed prayer; and then she heard a step along the corridor, which, by its slight irregularity of pace, she guessed to be Sir Edmund's.

He was limping towards his own apartments, Lord Shortlands having noticed his fatigue and—like the kind unselfish gentleman he was—ordering him off at once to bed: “because” (with a sigh) “good people are so scarce,”—Lady Shortlands’ illness setting her in that category at once.

Eugenia’s impulse was to hasten back and prevent Lord Shortlands’ entering the sick-room, which might disturb the patient. She waited till the footsteps ceased, and then she left her room. But she came upon Sir Edmund in the corridor; for he was standing still at the corner, before turning towards his own door, noting the light upon the armour and looking up at the great window near her

room; and, had her attention only been at liberty to peruse his face, she might have seen that he was thinking of her.

“Ah!” he said, when he saw her coming, “who but you? your step, and your gay satin dressing-gown!” and he pointed to her dark dust-cloak, and smiled.

Eugenia, with the satin coat about her, felt rather guilty. She had a friendly longing to take Sir Edmund into her confidence, to open her cloak and show him Buck’s bright colours beneath it: but she could not. In the wan light his face looked pale and tired, the more so doubtless after Buck’s florid glow. Sir Edmund had not eaten supper or drank brandies with the rest: he had been faithful and anxious from the first—from the very first—as Eugenia gratefully remembered. Now, at last, he felt that he was getting his reward in this twilit moment of her company. She dared not break his peace.

“It is like you, to have gone and made yourself useful ;” he said.

“I have not even changed my dress,” said Eugenia, with something between pain and annoyance in her tone—conscious, as she was, that her late embraces with the son of Mars could not be said to have any special “utility.” Then she stooped down, and began unpicking the bracken leaves from the bottom of her flounce, in a nervous manner, unlike her own. The threads gave way with an impatient raveling sound.

The ferns looked faded things enough, when they were disentangled: Sir Edmund held out his hand, and took them from her :

“Your jewels !” he said, smiling, “but what a reckless person to set about sick-nursing in her ball dress !”

“One of my dresses is as good—or as bad—as another,” said Eugenia ; “indeed this now is quite the worst I have, and it does not

crumple or rustle. It will do very well, until I can be spared in the morning."

"Are you going to sit up all night?"

"I am going to pretend to: I daresay I shall sleep in my arm-chair."

"I have only seen you in simple dresses," said Sir Edmund, "and now you are in sack-cloth; and yet you seem to me always more daintily and finely dressed than other people. You would become royal robes so well, that you suggest them: I could never be accurate, in describing what you had worn. The imagination, seeing you in—waterproof?—drapes you in brocade!"

"I am never likely to wear brocade," said Eugenia, with a glad sense of content: she was thinking of Buck, and wondering, deep down in her foolish heart, how much was a lieutenant's pay. It was all that they would have to live on, she conjectured.

"No," said Sir Edmund, with an acquiescent

sigh, though he seemed to get paler; “fine clothes would be no inducement to you . . . no attraction—”

He came a little closer. “I *must* tell him,” thought Eugenia.

Just at that moment, a certain door, on the further side of the house, was opened quickly, and Buck—whose habits were not adapted to country-house life,—flung out a pair of thick boots that he wanted early in the morning. He flung them out, whistling, and then banged the door, careless whether he disturbed any one or not. But, directly afterwards, he opened the door again, and set it ajar—Eugenia knew why.

“Good-night,” whispered Sir Edmund: “‘good wakefulness,’ as I must not wish you good sleep! If we stand here talking any longer, we shall get some artless soldier’s regulation boots at our heads, for disturbing his repose. He seems determined to leave his

repose liable to disturbance, whoever he may be!"

"Lord Shortlands is alone," said Eugenia, blushing beneath the smoking-coat, and feeling as if her arms and shoulders were aglow: "I must go back to him."

"He is putting on his dressing-gown," Sir Edmund answered, "he does not want you just yet; and Parfitt says your aunt is in a quiet doze. Burroughes is there. It is a sort of fit, or stroke, as you know: she must be watched and have perfect rest." And then,—for it was idle to stand talking within earshot of Buck's open door—he ceased his monitions.

"Chatteris has been making a sonnet," he whispered last of all, as he stood holding the hand that she had given him—more than half reluctant to let him go while all was yet unexplained—"he says, in it, that you looked like a star, at the ball, and all the rest of us like Chinese lanterns! I did not know how

true the image was, till I see you now, a morning star under this cloudy cloak. ‘Sweet Hesper-Phosphor, double star,’ ”—he quoted.

“The ball!” she said, dreamily. “Does it not seem so long ago—ages ago?”—But her voice was not sad, it seemed full of a new and mystic music, to Sir Edmund as he turned and left her.

As if the spell of her own voice had bound her, she did not move for some moments. She leaned upon the balcony, which was hung with soft Persian stuffs, and gazed down into the deserted hall, her eyes accustoming themselves to darkness till at last they could distinguish objects by the light reflected from the polished flooring. As she looked, and gradually made out the clusters and banks of flowers standing now all shyly huddled together and waiting for the morning with a phantasmal air, she felt a great desire to go down among them and take one or two strewn white blossoms for

a keepsake. Her life had been so healthful and so orderly that she had never before experienced that peculiar excitement and wakefulness which comes with the small hours.

She was charmed at last into giving way to her fancy. She glided down the broad staircase, so thickly velveted that it gave back no echo to her footfall, and wandered hither and thither in the changed scene: unconsciously perhaps she traced the line in which she had waltzed with Buck. She made a curious picture, had there been any one to see her, as she moved about in her noiseless dress, visionary and yet so living, the faint blazon-dyed light from the window falling on her hair, and the vivid colours of Buck's smoking-jacket glancing, now and then, from beneath her dusky wrapper.

The floor was littered with the wreckage from the ball, scraps of lace, ribbon, and leaves. It was just in its few hours' lull, for,

long ere any of the house party were down, the lightfooted—and, with such spoils, maybe lightfingered—household would have stripped it of its gleanings. Eugenia did not rob the housemaids of a single bit of rent-off flounce or feather, but as she turned and glanced, with a slight shudder, down the dark corridor, along which—in its brighter aspect—they had borne Lady Shortlands from the supper-table, she saw a little locket lying open at her feet, which she recognised as having been always pendent from a bracelet that her aunt had worn as long as she could remember. It was a locket of no special beauty, but connected, she had heard her own mother say, with a memory of youth. Eugenia picked it up, and within it she saw dimly, in the growing light, the face of Lady Shortlands' first lover.

A young boyish face: in the dress—ugly because so nearly modern—of some five and thirty years past, with the shaved upper lip and

the stiff stock and collar of the time, but with such a look of “I love you” in the handsome eyes, as not even the finnikin of the miniature painter could quite put out. On the opposite side was a lock of hair—curly as vine-tendrils—fancifully and unnaturally twisted, with a thread of gold, into something between a true lover’s knot and a shamrock. She had worn it for five and thirty years. That she had lost it, seemed indeed a sign that she had done with life!

Eugenia smiled: she would have wondered, before she came to Ashbank; now she did not wonder. What if this affection of the withered, dying, old worldling upstairs was strong with the strength of thirty—or of fifty years; the same immortal love had leaped to birth in her own heart, full grown, in fewer than fifty hours.

She held the locket, and she pondered breathless over it, in the difficult dawn; not

a god's picture, not a prince's, not a poet's ; just a young Irishman's ! but cherished as a poet, honoured as a prince, revered and worshipped as a god. "Thirty—fifty—an hundred years," said Eugenia musing, "it is for ever—it is for ever—I know."

She shut the locket, glad to have it in her own keeping, and she took two gardenias from the cornice of flowers that ran, breast high, around the hall. They seemed to hold embalmed the atmosphere which she had breathed, with her lover, in the waltz. Then she went upstairs ; but though she meant to go straight back to her uncle and the doctor, it was written that Eugenia had not done with half her folly yet. When she got to the division of the staircase, there, to the right, were Buck's boots, full in view, (for he had swung aside the *portière* that shut off the white doors of the rooms in the bachelors' wing;) and there—beyond the boots, where

they stood as sentries, one straight up and one half toppled over—was Buck's wide-open door.

Eugenia went up the right-hand stairway: at the head of it she stood still. She could hear her heart beating so loudly that, had any one come behind her, she would have never known it; but nobody did come. It is well for us, that, in these paroxysms of divine insanity, no eye sees us but God's.

Eugenia went to the boots, and she put them straight there side by side—the boots that had carried him up hill and down dale, in his brisk morning walk, that had carried him as he swaggered about the courtyards and the stables, that would carry him again to-morrow.—Little would he think whose hands had touched them! Then she lifted her eyes to the blank space that the open door was leaving. The spirit of the moment was upon her, and without reasoning, without even staying to marvel at herself as she marvelled

afterwards, she stood within the doorway and looked in : she did not cross the threshold with her feet, but yet her soul learned every corner of the room.

It was a little room, considering that it was 'Ashbank'—for this bachelors' wing had been built on by the Tomlinsons, and was a perfect pigeon-cote of bedrooms :—but, little as it was, the air struck cold upon her feverish heat. The window was just opposite the door, and it was open, so that there was a draught right through the room ; the beloved was not as susceptible to colds as to passions ; he could sleep through a drinking-song, or in a current of air, without disturbance or mishap. No blind was down : by some freak of its bay-window the room faced east, and the dawn was breaking now.

After one second, in which she saw nothing, Eugenia glanced round the room, with an air not so much of strangeness as of reverence, like one

that looks about some sacred place. There was his bath, with the big sponge in it, with which she was to wake him, if need were: it gleamed, at her feet, white and fresh. There was a chintz-hung sofa, upon which his dress coat had been tossed down; beyond it, nearer to the window, was the curtainless iron bedstead in which he should have been sleeping. But he had sat up, in case of her summons, and had fallen asleep at the window. He was seated in a chair that pushed back the dimity curtain: one brown, veined hand was thrown upon the sill, and it looked strangely dark on the contrasting white: his face was turned towards her, his close-cropped chestnut curls looking darker, also, against the shutter where he leaned. He was sleeping, despite the discomfort of his position, as only perfect health and perfect youth can sleep. And in the room there was that counted silence that only comes where a man sleeps thus, that is stiller than

empty silence. He did not even seem to breathe, he was as calm as death. His noisy, common-place young soul was away somewhere, in what happy hunting-grounds we wot not, or at rest ; it would come back with, what he had called, a "tidy swear," perhaps, at any rate with an impatient or a selfish thought ; but now in this dreamless enchantment of feverless and utter sleep that was upon him, he lay as one dead. A Venetian artist, of long ago, might have painted his head, with its strong tones of colour under the warm flushed skin, as the head of a young knight sleeping his last sleep at some post of watching ; its lines were beautiful and manly, its aspect grave.

Eugenia stood far off him, with a great solemnity about her, an awful yearning over him that was like religion. If he could, but once, have met that angel gaze of hers and have understood its meaning, all his life must

have been changed within him: but he would never know. She stood, leaning forward towards him, as a mother leans over her babe, with parted lips; “asleep,” she thought, “my own!” She dared not stir, she had no wish even to approach him, the chain of his deep slumber riveted her so, that the thought of his waking was a terror to her: and yet it seemed as if her heart would break with agony, if she did not assure herself the vision was true. She moved forward one step, at last, until with outstretched hand she touched the brass knob of the door: the whole length of the room was still between them. The cold touch of the handle reassured her, but at the same moment brought her to full consciousness of where she was. She drew back, stealing one last long look at his dear face—dearer, now, by the miracle of love, than all the world beside. “Love,” she said softly to herself, and then “God.” She

thought out no connection between the two words,—they were, to her, only two sides of the same immortal presence—but she folded her hands as in prayer.

Whether her presence troubled his sleep, or whether the chill of dawn was bringing him a dream of her, he shifted his head against the shutter, and raised his hand. Then the hand dropped again, and he was still as death. But Eugenia trembled at the risk she had run of waking him and vanished, like a breathless shadow, from the room.

In the passage she paused again : the silence held her like a charm : the day was up, it must have been almost morning, for every object was distinct in light. There were pale waking rims, like gossamers, upon the armour, everything seemed to rise up and stare at her wide-eyed. Only he, who should have leaped up at the dawn, was sinking deeper and deeper into sleep, with the growth of day. Yes ! it was

indeed as if he were dead. A new and unaccountable terror seized upon Eugenia, that terror for the beloved's safety and well-being, which—all unreasoning though it be—is comparable to no regret, to no grief else: her head swam, her eyes filled with tears, she hurried down the stairs like a ghost. Across the flower-decked landing, up her own little stairway, and so to her room again; where, ere she yet drew breath, she shut-to the door.

“Oh God!” she said, kneeling down at the open window, through which there stirred that same small chill that fanned her lover's temples as he slept—for this woman's life had been, from childhood at her mother's knee, one of such simple, constant prayer, that she went to God as she might indeed have gone to a father:—“Oh God! spare him, *do not let him be dead*: destroy me, take the world away from me, turn my meat and drink to dust and ashes, but leave me just his life, for he is all thy lovely

world, and all in all to me!"—and so at last grew calm. Some such a passion, and some such a self-devoting prayer, breathes in the "good-night, beloved," of every tender and true-hearted woman.

And then, smitten, on a sudden, with a pang of self-reproach for this agony of entreaty over a mere good-sleeper's most probable waking, she at last bethought her of her aunt. For no anxiety and no suffering on Buck's behalf could ever now seem to her to be unselfish—rather, they were the most selfish feelings that she could cherish, anxiety and suffering for what was most herself, her happiness incarnate, the very mainspring of her life.

She rose, and tried in vain to shake off the thought of him, that filled her; it was time she went to Lord Shortlands. "At least I know that he is safe, and that he sleeps," she said, aloud, as if to comfort her own self,—not of Lord Shortlands—nor could even the death

of her aunt have seemed to her sufficient cause to rob her lover of one moment's rest.

And yet, Eugenia, it was such a common thing that you had seen—just a young man asleep! Thank God, the nightly world—aye, and the daily world!—is full of them. In barrack or in fishing-cottage, anywhere and everywhere—among labourers or thieves—you might have seen the same wonderful trance, and the mystery of its removedness might never have dawned upon you. Only you were taking your first lessons of observation from the great master of romance ; and the nature of the man who was your world—as, to an astronomer, the nature of the midnight heavens, when he first feels that he is growing conversant with the stars in their courses—was full to you of portents and of marvels, which it would take a lifetime of increasing love to get familiar with, and which time could never at all explain or at all undo.

That the safety of a creature's sleep, who gives nobody else one moment's concern—a sleep which not the most affectionate of comrades would hesitate to disturb with a boot-jack or a sponge—should matter *most*, matter beyond another's life or death, is just one of those miracles which, to the uninitiated, appear as signs of a mere midsummer madness. But thus it was with Eugenia, and to her Buck's sleep was paramount to Lady Shortlands' waking,—a consummation to be question of a keener care, and worth a costlier solicitude.

Lord Shortlands was pacing up and down, between the dressing-room and the *boudoir*, to which he was limited; and, although his mind was away in the past, he was much in need of the solace of Eugenia's presence. And it was well for her that he did need her, or else she might have fallen into a retrospect that would have lasted until noon. He asked her no

questions : he saw that her appearance was changed, and he knew, from Lady Shortlands' *toilette*—which was a lengthier business than Eugenia's—that, “to change your dress is a matter of time and trouble :” but he was thankful for her company ; and her voice, as she questioned him in her considerate matter-of-fact manner, was very pleasant to his deaf ears.

“ What are we going to do ? ” she asked him.

“ Ah but — ” he said, “ what *can* we do without *her* ? My lady is a woman of ten thousand, and this attack seems likely to lay her terribly by.”—Evidently he would face no worse climax than a long illness, even in imagination.—“ We must get back to Shortlands, not to-day perhaps, but to-morrow. There is no need for haste ; Mrs. Tomlinson is kindness itself, and I should be sorry to break up the party here, till all are rested from last night's

fatigue." Beneath this pressure of anxiety, Lord Shortlands spoke like a man of half his years, and his senile drawl had quite left him: perhaps it had been part of a valetudinarianism which Lady Shortlands' taste for doctoring had not discouraged.

"Very well!" said Eugenia: she could question the wisdom of no reprieve that would bring her another day with her lover. She might have only a glimpse of him, but at least, the same roof would shelter them both. Lord Shortlands stopped in his walk and looked at her as she stood by a table on which a moderator lamp was burning. She was staring straight into the lamp, and unaware that his eyes were traversing her face.

"*She* would wish you to go to bed, my dear," said the old man, kindly: "you will be tired."

"Oh! I don't mind," said Eugenia. She wished that she did mind: she could have

pricked herself for her insensibility : she looked from the lamp to Lord Shortlands' wrinkled face, on which the light defined every crows-foot and shadow of age.

“ Have you seen Dr. Burroughes again ? ” she asked.

“ Yes,” he answered, “ Trefusis’ foresight is wonderful, I never knew a man behave with more consideration. A good fellow—a very good fellow. I am glad it should be *he* that is of service. *She* has a great regard for Trefusis—a great regard. And you, my dear, you like him, I think ? ”

“ Yes indeed,” said Eugenia, much too full of Buck to fancy she was in any way committing herself ; “ I like him very well indeed, I have never known any one kinder than Sir Edmund.”

A moment afterwards she blushed : she was thinking how little kindness counted for, in comparison with love.

Lord Shortlands was still watching her face, and he saw the blush.

“Ah! capital—capital!” he said; “I am glad you should not be blind to his merits; that’s the term, eh? ‘blind to his merits.’” It was good for Lord Shortlands to have even a moment’s distraction from his troubles, and Eugenia had not the heart to stop him as he went on: “Now compare him with the other young men here—a different nature. Those smart officers now—what are their names?—not that it matters.—‘Slapdash’ and ‘Scatterbrain,’ *she* called them, when she saw them coming from the stables in the morning.”

Eugenia smiled slowly: her memory was away in the morning too—the morning and the evening that had made her first day of love.

“Yes,” she said, “Sir Edmund is different.” And then she felt that the light was on her face, and moved away, leaving Lord Shortlands very well content.

She passed through the rooms again—now so differently ordered for sickness by Parfitt's deft hands, with the help of sleepless menials whom Mrs. Tomlinson had placed, with all Ashbank's resources, at her command:—and there, in the last chamber, was her aunt's rigid figure looking shrunken and small and awful, as it lay in the same posture on the bed. Could this body have held such a pulse of life as Buck's, such a pulse of love as her own, for sixty years?

Dr. Burroughes was bending over his patient and Parfitt was holding a candle which she shaded with one hand. She looked deeply interested and very self-conscious. She affected not to perceive Eugenia's entrance, but Eugenia knew that her mind was busy with surmises about Mr. Jarvis' visit. She disliked the thought that this tirewoman should be the only trustee of her precious secret, and she felt that her hastily snatched

cloak could not deceive Parfitt as to her dress.

Dr. Burroughes looked up, and smiled. He was not versed, like Parfitt, in the fashions; and to him the change in her appearance quite accounted for her absence. He motioned Parfitt to put down the light, as Eugenia entered, and came across the room to meet her. "I wish to bleed her ladyship," he said in a whisper, "the circulation needs a measure of that sort, to relieve the congestion. I do not think that she is paralysed: it is a state of apoplexy. If the pressure of the bloodvessels were removed, I think she would be conscious. Could I conceive a likely cause for it, I should say this was a fit, into which some shock had plunged her, under circumstances of excitement and ill-health.—There is, of course, the disposition to paralysis, which Sir Edmund noticed."—He paused.

Eugenia did not look at him; she stood with

her cloak folded round her, and she was glad to find that at last she suffered a keen pang of self-reproach: "I daresay you are right:" she said, but she made no suggestion.

"There are not likely to be leeches here," he went on, "and I must lose no time; or this continued congestion may result in another seizure. I shall open a vein in her arm. Her constitution is good I think?"

"Yes," said Eugenia, "I have never known her suffer but from ordinary ailments."

"Shall you stay in the room, or not?" he asked her diffidently.

"Oh yes," said Eugenia, "if you wish it." —She was not given to "nerves." —

"Pray think!" said Dr. Burroughes, as he took out his lancet, "can you assign any cause for such a shock as I surmise?"

For the first time in her life Eugenia hesitated to speak quite the truth. She was sure that, in concealing what, she felt, accounted for this

seizure, she was not preventing any means being taken for her aunt's recovery—there was that to be said for her—but her first thought was that this secret of hers had to do with her lover's happiness: therefore she had no right to disclose it. Much as she longed to say to the kind Doctor, “I fear that I am, in a sense, to blame,” she dared not—for his sake, who had become her world.

“No;” she said at last, with a sigh, “I cannot: but I do not doubt that your opinion is correct, and I will help you in whatever way I can.”

As she said this, both Dr. Burroughes and Parfitt were watching her with interest. They were aware in diverse ways that she was undergoing some mental reminiscence, and resolution; but they could not tell what a sting was in it, or what a balm. Eugenia's mind was in a retrospect. Sometimes, when sitting late at night and, on a sudden, hearing

midnight struck, one finds the several tolls bring back an instantaneous vision of the several hours which they register; and so it seemed to Eugenia, while she spoke those few words, that they let her see, in swift procession, the time gone by. The vision nerved her and decided her. She had cast in her lot with another: that was her own business, and had to do with her own life: but what patience and care could avail for her aunt, *that* she would do to the utmost of her power. Mechanically, she put back her cloak, and began turning up her loose sleeves, to be less hampered and more useful. She had forgotten what the sleeves were, only her instinct was to be free of them, and to Dr. Burroughes they had no significance—he saw that ladies' dressing-gowns were often brilliantly lined—but it was small wonder that Parfitt, who knew every detail of Eugenia's not too well-stocked wardrobe, should stand aghast, and even utter a slight

exclamation of surprise, as she caught sight of the crimson satin and the soldierly gold braiding and embroidery, upon the cuffs of Mr. Arthur Jarvis' smoking-jacket.

CHAPTER V.

RETROSPECT.

By the time that it was actually morning, Lady Shortlands was conscious and appeared in a fair way to regain both speech and movement. She had opened her eyes and fixed them upon her niece, with that unerring gaze of a person—specially an aged person—who is very ill; a gaze in which experience and prescience were strangely mingled. The bleeding had relieved her brain, and her faculties—always vivacious—did not long remain torpid. It was evident that she was scheming and had formed a wish.

The persistent way in which she regarded Eugenia surprised Dr. Burroughes, for it was not a dependent or a frightened way. He had expected that Lady Shortlands, being a

selfish woman, would come back to her senses with many outbursts of complaint and much ado. Instead of this, she behaved like one who has been momentarily hindered, and is determined to make up for lost time before attending to the effects of the drawback. He saw that there was something troubling her, which outweighed the trouble of her own illness, and that it had to do with Eugenia.

Nor could Eugenia feel other than embarrassed, when she saw her aunt's eyes rest, as the sage Parfitt's eyes had rested, upon those glimpses of the satin sleeve, which her first essay at sick-nursing rendered it impossible for her to hide consistently. Lady Shortlands reasoned from the satin sleeve to Eugenia's heightened colour, which robbed her of all traces of fatigue; until Eugenia, in her nervousness, found herself desperately hoping that her aunt might not recover her speech at once, from fear of what her first remark might be.

But Lady Shortlands was too sensible and too serious for a blunder: she lay still and pondered. As the blood-letting gradually restored her, she felt herself returning to a consciousness that flowed at first only to ebb, but that at last settled into more than her normal calm. Her first impression was of Eugenia's presence, and then she connected Eugenia with her last waking thought: she remembered Eugenia's arm on Arthur Jarvis' sleeve, the supper, the ball. . . . With her eyes still fixed upon her niece, she noted her change of dress, and fell to thinking out what *must* have happened—and, still more, what *might* have happened—in the interval. So on to plans and projects: and all this in a perfect silence, quite as awful as the silence of her seizure.

When she was again mistress of her speech, she used it first, however—like the thorough gentlewoman that she was—in thanking Dr. Burroughes for his unremitting care.

“ I am a very troublesome old woman ; ” she said, in a voice which she managed to control though it was changed and weak, “ and I am obliged ”—Lady Shortlands said “ obleeged ”—“ to you, sir, for your attention.”

Dr. Burroughes bowed, and told her, in reply, that he was amply repaid by her addressing him again. His courteous answer pleased her, but she asked no questions ; tacitly, she left her physical well-being in his hands : she had still to speak to Eugenia, who stood patiently awaiting her reproof. But her utterance was an unexpected one. “ I desire you,” she said slowly, “ to go to your room, and to sleep for some hours ; remember that your face is your fortune.”

At another time Eugenia might have combated such criticism, and resented such advice : to-day she did not dare to do so. She was glad to be set free without an exposure, and her very face, she felt, was now no longer her

own. It belonged to another—to one whose possessive glance would call the flush to it again by noon. She withdrew at once, leaving Parfitt with Dr. Burroughes, while she went to communicate to Lord Shortlands that her aunt was “quite herself again;” for his deafness had prevented his knowing how completely her speech had been paralysed during the night.

Lord Shortlands was anxious to get to her without delay, and presently he obtained Dr. Burroughes’ leave to go into the bedroom for a few minutes, the doctor himself joining Eugenia in the sitting-room, where they were, thus, alone together for a little while.

“You were very useful,” he said, “it was not your will, but your nature that I doubted: there are people who cannot bear the sight of blood.”

“Oh! I am not like that,” she answered, with a feeling of relief that he had left off trying to assign a cause to Lady Shortlands’

attack, and determined to keep him from tracing it, as long as she could: "your treatment seems to have done her good: it was wonderful to see the return of her faculties."

"Yes," said Dr. Burroughes; "for a time, at least, the congestion is relieved; but the measure was a strong one with an old person. I was anxious not to try it upon Lady Shortlands until there was every need. People of that age, even with her recuperative power, make blood but slowly."

"Doctors don't bleed people now, much, do they?" asked Eugenia vaguely; with the rather brutal show of interest that a perfectly strong person may evince in such a subject.

"No," he said, "not as they used to do: and for that very reason. We wish to preserve the patient's strength as far as possible."—

"I see," she answered, still vaguely, only conscious of the wish to put off a catechism

and make conversation : “ What would happen to *me* if I were to be bled ? ”

“ As you are now ? ” he asked her with a smile.— There is a charm in a beautiful woman’s sympathy with your profession, be it what it may, to which he was not insensible.

“ Yes ”—in a tone of merely assumed interest.

But Dr. Burroughes loved his profession.— “ As you are now, ” he said, “ in perfect health, it would make you weak and ill: you have no fever in your veins. Any considerable bleeding would leave you a different creature—perhaps bring on a serious indisposition.”

“ And yet it seemed to do *her* so much good ”—

“ That was because of the fever, the congestion : her temperature was abnormally high.”

“ I see, ” she said again. She just heard what he said, but it was immaterial.

By this time Dr. Burroughes wished to return to his patient, to see that her husband's visit was not disturbing her unduly. And Eugenia was glad to make an excuse to get at once to her own room.

And there—strange as it may seem—because the calm of loving is, after all, greater and deeper than all the disquiet of the world else, she had no sooner taken off her dress than she fell into as dreamless and profound a sleep as her lover was enjoying in his white room, now flooded with the radiant morning light. It came upon her like a wave, it “lapped her round.”

Dr. Burroughes was content to leave Lord and Lady Shortlands together, under Parfitt's watchful eye. He occupied the interval by a bath, and, while he was refreshing himself, he pondered over other things beside his patient's case. He pondered over what she had said to Eugenia, “your face is your fortune:”—he

had not looked upon Miss Brand as a dependent. — “ Well,” his meditations concluded, “ it is a very fine fortune, in this instance; ” and then his brisk thoughts galloped off again to his friend Sir Edmund Trefusis. He wished Sir Edmund would marry. Dr. Burroughes enjoyed the Ashbank bathroom, and settled his friend in life with Eugenia Brand: he thought her worthy of Sir Edmund. . . .

Meanwhile there was no exciting sentiment in the old people’s interview. Lord Shortlands had waited by the bedside until his wife opened her eyes again; for she had closed them when Eugenia left the room. When she saw him there, his presence did not seem unfamiliar.

“ Well, my dearest Agatha,” said the old man, at last, “ how are we now? ”

He spoke as one might speak to a sick child—he, who had lived in terror of the lash of his lady’s tongue, when he could hear it.

“I am well now,” said Lady Shortlands in her usual tone, “but I shall not be well long: we must get back to Shortlands to-morrow.” Her fingers tapped the quilt impatiently.

“Very good,” said his lordship, for Dr. Burroughes had told him that he must contradict no wish of hers, however impossible or irrational it sounded.

“I have done what I came for,” she said— much as, in choicer words, St. Simeon did— “Sir Edmund is in love with the creature.”

“And ‘the creature,’ ” said Lord Shortlands, glad to have so palatable a piece of news to impart, “tells me she never knew anybody like Sir Edmund.”

Lady Shortlands was silent for a minute, and seemed to be thinking deeply: then she yawned: “She is quite right,” she said, “she never did. That is my wish, Shortlands,” she added, turning towards him with peremptory, expressive eyes.

“Certainly, my dear,” said his lordship meekly, with the air of one awaiting further orders: “you are always thinking of others, always unselfish.”—

Lady Shortlands’ answer was made in a tone which she knew, from long experience, he could not hear: “I am thinking of the creature’s snub to her grandfather;” she said, “we Carruthers never forget: and you are an old fool.”

“Certainly, certainly,” said Lord Shortlands again, assenting to what he thought she murmured: for his own part, he generally said the same thing twice over.

“I wish to see the Jew,” said his wife presently: she never attempted to correct him, and indeed he was generally punished enough, by his “crooked answers.”

“The *who?* my dearest Agatha.”

“Not the ‘*who?*’—the *Jew*: I wish to see Anne Jefferies.”

Lord Shortlands was puzzled: he did not know what might be his lady's notion of the hour. Anne Jefferies was no doubt sleeping the sleep of the just.

She read his thoughts, "I should like to see her at ten o'clock. Eugenia will be sound asleep by then, Burroughes at his breakfast, and Parfitt an idiot: I wish to see her alone."

"She is a clever, sensible girl," said his lordship.

"Never you mind about that,"—she replied. "I wish to see her: and mind, I do *not* wish to see the Tomlinsons: if I am going out of the world, I wish to go from a *milieu* of gentle people." She said the last words lower, for she never could habituate her husband to such speeches, much as Vane might like them; but his deafness suffered her to have the pleasure of hearing herself say them.

"Mrs. Tomlinson has placed *all* *Ashbank*

at our disposal," he said, uncertain as to the purport of her muttering.

"Ah!" said Lady Shortlands, drily, "this will be the making of Ashbank: no doubt she expects my daughters to come here; but I think," she added in her veiled tone, "that the fact of my immediate removal will spoil the paragraphs:"—and she chuckled a little. "Now don't forget to send me the infant Samuel."

Lord Shortlands chuckled too, for he heard that speech: her ladyship allowed him to hear it, because it was not illnatured, and he thought that it was what amused her; he took it for a good sign.

The house became very sunny: it was still as a tomb, but it was saturated with the gradual light: all the rooms began to smell sweet of flowers, as the sun woke their scents to life. Lady Shortlands lay upon her cool frilled pillows, with her kind old lord sitting at her bedside, and thought that, after all, it was not

so bad to be ill. Although she felt too weak to move herself, her fevered frame was calm: her surcharged veins ran with a temperate tide; her brain was busy, and her sight was clear. She lay and schemed, and her scheming soothed her soul.

Presently Lord Shortlands nodded, as the sunlight made him drowsy after his night's waking. Her schemes were interrupted, and she packed him off to bed. Parfitt resumed her watch: then Parfitt, too, began to doze a little. But still Lady Shortlands did not sleep, though life looked small to her, and the hour was full of dreams. With her husband's presence, she dismissed her anxiety about Eugenia for a while: her plan was made, it only waited sympathetic furtherance. She let her memory wander back, for comfort, to scenes of five and thirty years before. No doubt, at this untimely hour of the early summer day, every other soul at Ashbank—what with the fatigue incidental

to the ball and the weariness of anxious watching—was “fallen on sleep.” Strange!—that only this one old woman, most world-worn soul of all, should be waking, and that her waking thought should be busied with no living creature, but just with the remembrance of one long-dead young man. She and he had danced together in Dublin, and from dancing they had got to loving; and, when that seal was set on their attachment, they were parted—quite expediently parted—and time that had used her so well till now, that had brought her fortune and children and a Ducal son-in-law, had taken him a great while since, as one of small account, and turned him into dust. The daisies of many and many a year had grown out of his grave; she did not even know where he was buried. But she had loved him. His was an image that had been enshrined, he filled her heart for ever. Over all this sleeping household he was the one dominant vision, this one waking

brain was his throne still and no man's else. He held his sway. She saw nothing but him as the day grew ; it was his loving hand that seemed to be binding up her wounded arm : he had been the boon of her life, he was to be the comfort of her death.

She pressed her wrist against the quilt, to feel the bracelet with his portrait on her arm. The bracelet was there, but the portrait was gone. Her restlessness returned ten-fold ; the blood leaped into her forehead, and her arm stung her.

Then she became aware that the morning silence was broken by various faint creakings heard from far, and her quick ears detected the movement of housemaids as they set the hall in order with light sweepings and the tapping of brushes against the stairs and boards. They would find her secret :—not that they would have been much the wiser if they had found it.

She felt feverish and roused Parfitt :

“Woman,” she said, “wake up! you snore, and you look absurd: what did you do with my trinkets?”

Parfitt bestirred herself, chagrined at her ladyship’s comments upon her nursing and her looks: she had told Sir Edmund’s valet that she was “*such* a wakeful one: that she never closed an eye but in her bed, and there slept as light as a feather.” She went to the dressing-table, arranging her cap at the mirror as she did so, and, with some proper pride, produced her lady’s jewels put together on a crystal tray, but Lady Shortlands’ eye at once perceived that the locket from this special bracelet, which was never taken off, was not among them.

And then she saw it, lying on a little table by the bed. It had been placed there: it could not have dropped from her arm, on to that table; and the truth struck her, that Eugenia must have laid it there at her side: for Parfitt did not even see it.

“Could the creature really have come to that pitch of understanding ?” thought the old lady, rather with alarm than remorse ; she made Parfitt secure the locket to the bracelet more firmly, with a reprimand for carelessness which it did her good to make ; and then her fancy turned again to Eugenia’s future.

As soon as more decided stirrings, in the corridor outside, warned them that other of the guests were awake, Parfitt put Lady Shortlands into some semblance of order, though her complexion was not as disarranged as it would have been after a night’s sleep, and, on the stroke of ten, Dr. Burroughes brought Miss Jefferies into the room, before he went to his breakfast, and roused his patient to welcome her.

Anne was a very reassuring apparition to an invalid. Some years ago her mother had succumbed to a long and very tedious illness, so she had been for months experienced in

a sick-room. Lady Shortlands' eyes rested upon her with satisfaction and a confidence that was not misplaced. Anne was neatly dressed in a soft white gown that did not rustle and was plainly made, though its fit was so perfect that it brought back Parfitt to comparative vivacity. Her sleek dark hair looked all the glossier for this simple dress, and her slim fingers were cool and light as she laid them upon Lady Shortlands' hand. "I am here," she said, with a presentiment that she was summoned to be the recipient of anxious confidence, "Dr. Burroughes says I may come, and, if I can do anything to please you, pray let me do it."

Despite her youth, Anne's knowledge of the world was pretty nearly on a par with Lady Shortlands' own. She had one of those original minds—born middle-aged—with which an only daughter sometimes, as it were, resumes the mental qualities of both her parents.

Anne was her own brother ; she inherited her father's shrewdness, and her mother's patience.

“ Thank you ; ” said Lady Shortlands, as she might have answered a lawyer, and she said no more : her trusting Anne, she felt, was, in itself, sufficient compliment. Miss Jefferies took upon herself to sign that Parfitt should leave the room ; then she seated herself at the bedside.

“ I wish *you* were my niece,” said her ladyship, drawing a deep breath, “ you are not a fool.”

Anne smiled cynically, “ I’ve got the better of that,” she said, “ what do you want me to do ? ” She spoke with the air of one who waives an explanation as unnecessary. She knew well enough that it was of Eugenia that Lady Shortlands wished to speak.

“ I want you,” said her ladyship, “ to look after the creature : I believe she is going to be an idiot.”

Anne recollected what she had seen at midnight in the marble temple, and to herself she thought the future tense misplaced.

“I brought her here to marry Sir Edmund Tre-what’s-his-name,” said Lady Shortlands testily.

“And not to become ‘Mrs. Jones;’” said Anne, “she is certainly too good for that.”

“Do you like Eugenia?” asked Lady Shortlands—something in Anne’s tone struck her as curious.

“I like her,” said Anne, “as an ugly girl likes a beautiful woman. Perhaps that’s the same as hating her—I don’t know: but, if it is, I want to hate her fairly, not at a disadvantage. I should like her to be Lady Trefusis when I’m Lady Torré: you see, unfortunately, as things are, it isn’t worth my while to like or dislike people:—I’m too rich! But that would strike the balance. There’d be no spice in hating ‘Mrs. Jones’—if I *do* hate her.”

"You really are going to marry Lord Torre?" said Lady Shortlands: "I had thought of him as a second string to Eugenia's bow, if Sir Edmund failed."—At which they both laughed.

"He's much better suited with *me*," said Anne. "Yes, I suppose I shall marry him, some day, but at present I like going to his parties: '*où passerai-je mes soirées?*'"

"Well then," said Lady Shortlands, straightening herself in her anxiety. "If you're practically an engaged woman, you can do what you like!"

"That's about it;" said Anne, "but I didn't wait to be 'an engaged woman' for that!"

"Then why don't *you* encourage Jones?"—Anne made a face of disgust, which changed to amusement, without a trace of *pique*, as Lady Shortlands meditatively added,—"It is a pity that you are not prettier."

"It *is* a pity ;" she said, "however I daresay 'Jones' would forgive me that, for the sake of my fortune, if I took him in hand ; but I couldn't ! could anybody marry *him* ?"

Lady Shortlands echoed her laugh : "Oh ! marriage :" she said, "that is serious.—But I don't know whether he would be withdrawn from the creature, unless it were question of that."

"Not certainly by my unaided charms !" said Anne, and then she stopped : she hardly liked to say what had occurred to her quick instinct.

"But May !" cried Lady Shortlands, sitting bolt upright in bed.

"She might get to like him really," said Anne, "that would never do—I don't know though : she's no fool."

"No ;" said Lady Shortlands, relapsing, "the woman Buxton would come and knife me in my bed—I beg your pardon, I forgot she was your aunt."

“Oh! don’t mind me!” said Anne. “But you see ‘the creature’ would never give him up to May:—why should she? May has no money either:—she might to *me*.”

“But you might manage it between you;” said Lady Shortlands craftily. “After all, it’s a mere pastime; and you’re always together, so it couldn’t come to be a bore: *if May were to drag him about, and the creature were to think it was you?*” . . .

Anne smiled: she saw Lady Shortlands’ drift plainly enough. The prospect was legitimate—for neither she nor her ladyship had any notion that Eugenia considered herself “engaged,”—and Anne liked a plan. “It’s a real kindness to Miss Brand,” she thought; for such a love as Eugenia’s was for Buck, surpassed her comprehension altogether: it was like the lily in the old Italian song, which grew so tall in a night that you could sit beneath its shade in the morning.

The two women—one old and sick, the other young and active—sat and worked out their plot together in that glowing sunlit hour. They thought that they were working for the best, but the scheme they made was one to blight Eugenia's very life. It meant neither more nor less than the complete prevention of love passages between Lieutenant Jarvis and Miss Brand. It was really May, whose sprightliness and charm were to catch the young soldier's fancy, but Eugenia was not to know that. What she was to imagine—and what she did imagine—time will show. For it is not more edifying to describe than it should be interesting to read, how a morning could be marred over a plan like this. . . .

“It *is* only a fancy, I suppose,” Lady Shortlands concluded; for the remembrance of her own young lover, whose image had haunted her so in the small hours, was present with her still.

“ How can it be anything else ? ” said Anne, in her convincing, rational way. She was a person whose inclinations were not swift, although her instincts were. The one flirtation that had touched her heart at all, in her girlhood’s days—for somehow Anne seemed more than a girl, since her mother’s death—had been pursued with her music-master. It had taken years of intimacy to produce, and but one breath of sarcasm to dispel. It was this ephemeral incident of which Lady Shortlands had made so much capital to Mrs. Tomlinson. But Anne did not know of that conversation, or she might not have been so ready to abet her ladyship in her scheme.

The plot depended, to no small extent, on pretty May; and, when Dr. Burroughes had finished his breakfast, and, finding his patient much exhausted, had prescribed her complete rest, over which he would himself keep guard, Anne crossed the passage to the two chintz-

bedrooms and passed through her own to May's.

This young damsel was still in bed, for she had danced with all her might, so long as the dancing lasted; and, beside a great amount of admiration from the White Highlanders, had earned profound repose. Which repose Anne ruthlessly disturbed, as she entered the room, the brisker for her interview with Lady Shortlands: she took a little run and perched herself upon the bed.

“Well!” she said, “wake up, May, it's more than half-past ten!”

“Don't tease;” said May: and then,—awaking thoroughly,—“how is Lady Shortlands?” —Anne had roused her, when she went to Lady Shortlands' room, and made her promise to get up, but she had fallen asleep again, with her bright hair tumbled over the pillows.—

“Mother Shortlands is not dead by any means,” said Anne trenchantly: “she is sitting

up in bed, painted like a mummy, and slating us all round."

"What have we done?" said May yawning, with a happy sense of immunity from criticism.

"Well, in my case, I am to blame, for not being prettier: though her ladyship agrees with me that Torre has forgiven me that, for the sake of my fortune."

"Nasty old polecat!" said May—"I don't mean Lord Torre, Anne, and I think you *are* pretty."

"This child is quite of your opinion;" said Anne, with the same *sang-froid* in which she had endorsed Lady Shortlands' verdict on her looks: "between you and me, I'm a woman in ten thousand—Oh! I don't mind your telling Torre—a woman of a peculiar style of beauty. However, I let her say her say! Well! that was 'one for me.' Next, she is very angry with your dear Eugenia, for not bringing Sir Edmund to the point last night."

“Oh! I saw that,” said May, “and I believe it gave her that horrid fit to see Miss Brand come in to supper with . . . with Mr. Jarvis.” May hesitated before she said Buck’s name, and pressed her face into the pillows with another yawn. Anne could only see her ear but it was blushing.

“Oh,” she said, mimicking her cousin, “‘with Mr. Jarvis’ . . . Well miss, then we come to another offender! Lady Shortlands is very angry with *you*.”

“I thought you said Miss Brand was the offender,”—said May, looking up from her pillows.

“Oh, we’re all offenders,” said Anne tentatively, “specially Jarvis!”

There was no doubt about May’s blushing now, and “ah!” thought Anne, “there’s more in this than meets the eye!” . . . So she went on: “The ‘polecat’ as you politely call *her*, is very angry with *you* for flirting with Mr. Jarvis

—or ‘Jones’ as she calls *him*—there’s a perfect cross-fire of epithets in this monkey-house.”

“Oh!” . . . said May rather frightened; “but Anne,” she added innocently, “that was *after she had her fit*.”

“What was ‘*after she had her fit!*’” asked Anne demurely: no one would have guessed from her tone that she was in the dark on any subject. It was her usual tone of conscious banter.

“I’ll tell you;” said May, “we had danced together once, certainly, before she was taken ill: but I don’t think she *could* have noticed that; I believe she was in the library with Vane—I suppose they went there to tell each other horrid stories:—and, after that, he disappeared with Miss Brand.”

“Who did?—Vane?”

“Mr. Jarvis, stupid: Oh! Anne he admires her so much! . . . Then, it was when she was carried off, in that sickening way, and

Miss Brand had to go too, that he came and asked *me* to dance, and *afterwards* to go into the garden.”—

“Oh! was it *afterwards*?” said Anne, “I remember: Oh! you naughty! and out you went like an arrow from the bow!”

“Well, but, Anne, I do really think he’s nice: he spoke of Miss Brand with such admiration—I believe he’s spooney on her.”—

Anne gave a little scream and put her fingers in her ears.

“Idiot!” said May, laughing, and giving her a soft kick, “he is very impulsive—ardent you know.”

“Did you find him ‘ardent you know?’” said Anne in the same bantering tone: “that sort of red-headed man is, I believe, violent in his likes and dislikes.”

“Oh! it is more than that!” said May with a sigh, “at least I think it might be.”

“Well,” said Anne confidentially, “she’s a

great flirt, and that's about the truth of it—engaged to Sir Edmund, as she ought to be by now, if she isn't."

"Oh! I'm sure she *isn't*," said May, and she sighed again.

"I caught her, myself," Anne went on, "mooning about that little damp hole of a temple, with your precious Jones;—for I really had looked on him as *your* booty before."—

"Had you?" said May, plucking at the counterpane with her pretty pink fingers. Then at last she looked straight at her cousin. She had never kept a secret from Anne Jeffries:—few people had, for if she wished to discover one she found it out—"I *do* like him, Anne," she said, "at least I *could* like him, but how could he ever take to me after Miss Brand?"—

"Well! as far as *she* goes," said Anne, enchanted with the unforeseen likelihood of

success to Lady Shortlands' scheme, "he must be as free as air; for she's safe to be pledged to Sir Edmund in time: if she isn't, old Mother Shortlands will explode again and go off like a rocket."

"But what if Mr. Jarvis is in *love* with her?"

"Mr. Jarvis doesn't know what that small word means, May: not but what you seem to be doing your level best to teach him."

"Oh! Anne, you are so dreadful!"—

"I am;" said Anne, "you describe me to a nicety. Cut along, Miss Innocence, and tell me more: he praised Miss Brand to you, and what did you say to that? Did not your bleeding heart cry 'hold, enough?'"

May laughed. "Oh, I said, 'yes, of course,' she *was* 'very charming,' and all that sort of thing."

"With some nasty little *proviso* to your praise, I suppose?"

“ I said she was rather *old*; ” May confessed, laughing outright.

“ And then what did he say ? ”

“ Oh ! he said he ‘ liked them like that.’ ”

“ Constant swain ! ” said Anne, joining in May’s laughter, “ I don’t think that I’ve ever heard a lover’s speech much funnier than that. You goose, if she were the ‘ lady of his heart,’ do you think he’d say he ‘ liked them old ? ’ ”

“ You don’t think that he *is* in love with her, then,” said May, “ he *told* me that he was.”

“ *Raison de plus !* ” said Anne. “ Perhaps he thinks so, but you had better wean him from this morbid attachment, as indeed, you seem in a fair way to do. But go on, May ! describe these ‘ passages : ’ my spinster soul is thrilled.” —

“ What nonsense, Anne, I’m sure you know more about it than I do : we danced ; and then we went upon the terrace, and looked

at the lanterns: and he said he was ‘very anxious about Lady Shortlands,’ and I said ‘Why? because I thought she was so odious?’ and then he laughed, and said—in that dear rough way of his, Anne, which I suppose makes you call him a ‘pig’—that he ‘wished she was *his* auntie,’ and that he ‘meant to have a try to make her so,—and a very sporting auntie she’d be:’ and it was after that, we came to talking of Miss Brand.”

“Upon my word, you seem to have led up to her name, between you, in a very graceful and delicate manner;” said Anne, with her most satirical smile; “pray did this pleasant-spoken champion make any comments upon *me*: he couldn’t have said, as my pupil Mr. Crossley said of Miss Brand, that I was a ‘gallows good shaped ‘un,’ but he might at least have called me a ‘sporting auntie.’”

“He didn’t though,” said May, with a delighted laugh, “but he *did* say that of

course you were 'the one for a chap to go in for who wanted to better himself,' because you had 'such ripping lots of tin.'"

"Let him 'go in for me,' that's all!" said Anne, with a sniff of contempt, "and what may have been your reply to that? I suppose, with maiden modesty, you drew a pleasing contrast between your own unadorned beauty, and my gilded pomp!"

"You certainly are very coarse," said May, "we didn't talk about myself at all, except just at the last. He was talking *to* me, not *of* me; and so nicely,—as if I were his own self."

"That was a compliment indeed!" said Anne. "What do you mean by 'just at the last?'" she added, with merciless exactitude, for she knew enough of the frequency and the shallowness of May's fancies, to have no fear of paining her.

"How you do catechise me, Anne! Just at the last, he said, in a rather nice way, that

he had never had a sister, and so it was quite a new thing for him to have the sympathy of—Oh! Anne, how you do bother; don't glare at me so!—of a ‘nice, soft, shy little puss like me,’ if you *must* have it!”

“ Dear young man!” said Anne with an indignant laugh: “ Yes, May, I ‘*must* have it’—so prettily put, wasn’t it? Whereat, of course, you simpered.”

“ ‘Whereat of course,’ ” said May, with the relieved manner of one whose confidence is wholly told; “ Mr. Crossley appeared upon the scene, and said he had been looking for me everywhere.”

“ ‘*Vogue la galère,*’ ” cried Anne; “ and off you went, to go through much the same small pantomime with *my* gallant officer. All’s fish that comes to your net, May—‘*je m'y connais!*’ ”

“ Coarse again,” said May, “ and so polyglot! Perhaps Mr. Crossley *is* the nicer of

the two : but there's something rather I-don't-know-what, about Mr. Jarvis: he's so outspoken."

" He appears to be," said Anne with a sneer, " and then he said ' goodnight,' to return to our mutton—pork I mean—once more ? "

" He said — what *did* he say ? "—May pondered for a moment—(" Don't invent," said Anne).—" He said that he'd ' put a Soda and B. on board,' because he might be wanted to help nurse Lady Shortlands."

" Quite one of the family, in fact ; " said Anne,—amused as she thought what Lady Shortlands' indignation would be, when she heard of Buck as her likely consoler in sickness ;—" and that was all ? "

" That was all he said to *me*—every word :—but he said something else to Mr. Crossley :—I heard it though—how oddly men talk to each other, Anne, don't they ? "

" I don't know," said Anne; " I'm not one

of that inferior sex, you see—what did he say that was so odd? It's his vocabulary that I like so much. I'm delighted with it!"

"He said to Crossley," said May laughing—"let me think of it exactly—yes!—that if he was 'caught on the light fantastic, when old tabby handed in her cheques, he should sweat for it!'"

"Ardent, artless, refined young man!" said Anne, jumping off the bed in her enthusiasm. "His prediction, May, was quite prophetic—whether 'old tabby hands in her cheques' or not, he *shall* 'sweat for it.' He shall enjoy a perfect Turkish bath, and I—*moi qui vous parle*—will do him the honour of assisting at his moral ablutions, in the very hottest room."

"Anne! have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I have," said Anne; "'farewell—a long farewell—to all my'—senses! And now get up at once, and make yourself as pretty as

you can ; for you shall have him to yourself all the morning—that's to say if I can spare him ; for this young ‘gentle person’ (as Lady Shortlands would—or rather as she wouldn’t—call him) so delights me, that I shall try and make what impression I can on him, with my own gilded pomp, before the day is out.”

“ You, Anne ? ”

“ Me, May ! ”

“ Why don’t you ‘set your cap’ at Mr. Crossley ? ”

“ *My cap !* ” said Anne, stroking her sleek hair ; “ *I’m afraid he mightn’t see it*, if I did : there’s a joke for you, which would have sent ‘old tabby’ into convulsions if she’d made it herself, but which she’d receive ‘mute as the fish,’ if I told it her. Come, my angel ! we will divide the spoil ! we will take them both : we will play lawn-tennis ; we will go out in a boat and get bulrushes for Miss Brand—perhaps the willow would be more appropriate

—we will make a little square party and pervade Ashbank. They shall run for us, and row for us, and carry our baskets and our wraps: the ‘soft little puss’—for ‘cat,’ my dear, you *are*, though I cannot bring myself to call you ‘shy’—and the ‘ripping lots of tin,’ shall both depend upon their manly strength to-day: to use his own imitable parlance—so far, far more expressive than my ‘polyglot’—Mr. Jones and his *fidus Achates* shall ‘sweat for it!’ ”

What with her indignation and the ferment of her scheme, Anne Jefferies was in her highest spirits already: and the contagion of Anne’s glee, with the probability of spice in the way of flirtation, was quite enough to make May forget the fatigues of the ball.

Meanwhile, how fared it with Eugenia?—for long ago, Arthur Jarvis was up and away on a bathing expedition, to a cove more than a

mile from the house, with Boville and Crossley and Vane.

When Parfitt went into Eugenia's room, she found her wide awake, but quite forgetful that her waking hours were not at her own disposal. Truth to tell, she had opened her beautiful eyes but a few minutes before ; and they were so full of the idealised image of her beloved that the hard realities of pain and care had not yet dawned upon their vision.

She greeted Parfitt with a radiant smile, as one sometimes finds oneself greeting a mere acquaintance with the cordial welcome that should be kept for a friend, when one is listening to sweet music.

“ Well, Miss Brand,” said Parfitt, drily,—for she was worn out with her nominal watching, and on her way to, what she called “ *get* her hair down and *get* to bed,”—“ you look as if *your* dreams had been pleasant enough.”

“ I have not dreamed,” said Eugenia, taking

a letter from her mother which Parfitt brought her: but she did not open it. She liked to see it, for it was a tangible sign that she was not dreaming now, but she did not want to read yet. She lay back upon her pillows, with the same lovely smile, lulled in an enchantment of content and rest. She glanced round the room—how beautiful it was; how sweet the fragrant air through the open window, and the sun full on the window already . . . it must be late! Then her eyes rested upon Parfitt's unkempt head, and the sight brought her back to her senses with a shock.

“How is milady?” she said at once, with some self-reproach in her tone.

“Sharp as a needle!” said Parfitt, “she's been calling me names all the morning: ‘slut’ was a mild one: and she said I looked ‘absurd’—that I should live to be called an ‘absurd slut!’—and I daresay she said so to Miss Jefferies.”

“To Miss Jefferies?”

“Oh! yes, Miss Brand: Milady’s been giving Miss Jefferies a turn of her tongue too, but she couldn’t call *her* a ‘slut’ at all events, —a better fitting, *cachemire* I never saw; tight as a glove, and a flow like water.”—

“I had better go to her at once,” said Eugenia, preparing to rise.

“No, Miss, she’s sound asleep, and the doctor is there: he says the danger’s past for the present,—not but what milady’s had a squeak for it, as they say. She’s been at Death’s door,” concluded the tirewoman,—not without some satisfaction, in feeling that she, perhaps, had helped to win poor Lady Shortlands back again to life,—“she’s been at Death’s door, and she’s as good as knocked: but—begging your pardon, Miss Brand, if I seem profane—he was not prepared for her tongue or her temper, at present.”

With which bold flight of allegoric metaphor,

Parfitt cut short her visit to Eugenia; leaving her free to rise and take her bath in her sunny chapel-bedroom.

Eugenia was not sorry to find that Buck's smart jacket—which, with new-found foolishness, she had placed over her before she slept—had fallen down, overweighted with its gilt, upon the further side of the little silk-hung bed, and thus escaped the vigilance of Parfitt's gaze. Perhaps Parfitt had been looking for it, as she prowled about the room and gathered up the wreck of Eugenia's grey-green gown and its bracken trimmings.

People who have admiration and to spare for Elaine's musings over Launcelot's shield, might still have smiled, perhaps, at our dear Eugenia gazing at her young soldier's smoking-coat: but her beauty was beyond Elaine's, and her love was much the same love, after all; —the one romance of a devoted life. Before she dressed herself, she folded up the jacket,

and she kissed it on the left side, over a badge that was embroidered there and had rested upon his heart, and hers. One wishes one had skill to paint her face under the ripple of her light-brown hair, as she stooped to bless it so.

When she had put on the plain dress in which she had first appeared at Ashbank, she went downstairs to breakfast, looking both younger and more beautiful than before, with the rose-leaf blush, upon her sweet and noble face, that was called up by her remembrance of the past night's hour, on that same stairway. She cast one glance up to the open door of Buck's room, where the housemaids were now busy. It seemed to Eugenia, because, with the morning light, the state of her mind had cleared a little, that her angel visit to that threshold of Buck's door had been a very heinous and a very unmaidenly action. But she was naturally one upon whom convention

had but a slight hold : the distinction of “right and wrong” was familiar to her, but that of “prudent and imprudent,” strange. She and her lover were now one : that was her view of what, to many girls and to most men, would have been only a pronounced flirtation. Their marriage might be a question of time, but meanwhile and always, since that first kiss was given, they belonged to each other. By the waking dream of a single day and night, she was constituted and consecrated for ever, in her heart of hearts, his guardian, his friend, his wife. For Eugenia was the very antithesis of those many women who, after, what Anne Jefferies had called, “passages,” of an evening, can greet a man almost as a stranger, on the following morning. The love of such women is just an inverted dayflower; its petals are close folded all day long, and, though it nightly may unfold to a few hours of dance-music and champagne, it is sound asleep again

by the following morning. But Eugenia's love was like the blossom of some gorgeous aloe. It opened out its petals in such beauty that a world might gaze on it and wonder: it knew neither shrinking nor shame: it bloomed once and for ever: it was the completion and the end of her being. Day might come or night, pleasure or pain; once blossomed, it would not wax nor wane until it died—and here ceased the parallel, for it was immortal. It was at once her peril and her prize, her glory and her grief.

But, for all this, the feeling was upon her—and it brought the blush to her cheek—that she would die, sooner than that any of her companions should know the futile passion of solicitude to which she had given way, in those still hours of the early morning. She need, we know, have had no fear: like all the great and secret things of most lives' love, it went down to its grave in her deep heart.

To a poet or a philosopher, there would have

been something almost tragic, in the recognition of the start this passion had made in Eugenia's life. She was so thoroughly—and in the fullest, as the strictest, sense—a single-hearted woman. The gift once given, the bent of her whole nature followed the lead of love. And her expectation had been to take up the thread of her delight, just where sleep had let it fall.

So that it was with a sort of grieved surprise that, on coming downstairs, she found Arthur Jarvis nowhere, in hall or library or breakfast room, and at last heard casually from James Chatteris, of the bathing-party, which had started at nine o'clock and which he had been far too sound asleep to join. The poet had, indeed, not breakfasted when Eugenia came down. He looked tired, for he was unaccustomed to late hours and was sympathetic enough to have been greatly troubled by the untoward circumstance of Lady Shortlands' seizure, of

which he was disposed to talk with bated breath as they seated themselves at the table together. Eugenia's hopeful tone and radiant air puzzled him much.

“I thought you would be all half-dead,” he said chagrined, “and Ashbank like the sleeping beauty's palace; and I come down to find that other men are up and out, and that Miss Jefferies and Miss Buxton have already breakfasted—whether here or in their rooms deponent sayeth not—while you, even you, ‘your ain sel,’ on whom the cross has fallen, are not ‘one penny the worse.’”

“There is no danger,” said Eugenia, “and if there were, what could we do? Let us eat our breakfast.”

There was nothing strange in her words:—they might have been suggested either by despondency or heartlessness—but in her voice there was an extraordinary ring which the young poet's ear detected, though he could not

understand it. For it had a buoyant sound, almost as if she must “break forth in singing.”

To prevent himself looking at her, he applied his attention with true Scotch zest to his rolls and the wonderful Ashbank viands—always ready, and yet always just fit for eating. He gave Eugenia some fish and she began her breakfast with more than her usual zest; she thought she was hungry; but then, of a sudden, she found that she could not eat—she felt as if she must be up and off, doing something else. Every fibre of her body seemed to be feasting full on the renewed excitement of her heart and brain. She was quite well, and she had an appetite, but it did not require food.

She put down her knife and fork after a minute or two, and said rather absently, “What time did they go?”

“Oh! very soon after supper. They would not stay, although Mrs. Tomlinson and Sir Edmund reassured them.”

“ What do you mean ? ” she asked in amazement, “ they are not *gone* ? ”

Chatteris was at a loss. He had interpreted her question as having reference to the many guests at the ball, from which she had been so abruptly torn.

“ I mean the men who went to bathe ; ” she said impatiently.

“ How can I tell you that, my cousin ? These men of muscle seem to despise sleep. I think, ” he added with a touch of satire, “ that they are always half asleep, and so they don’t need rest ; or do you think, perhaps, that they sleep twice as sound as other folk ? ”

Eugenia thought of Buck “ sitting up, ” as he had called it, in that deep dreamless slumber in which she had beheld him—that most complete and excellent oblivion of all the world, that looked as if an hour of it would divorce one from fatigue, like death.

“ Oh ! they sleep soundly, ” she said lightly,

“I slept soundly too: did not you? Or did you sit up and make a poem? Sir Edmund told me last night that you were making a poem—about me! May I not hear it?”

James Chatteris thought her tone was changed indeed: yesterday she would have been more diffident, if not more gentle, afraid of self-assertion and trespass. Now, if only he had known it, she was conscious in her heart of such a trespass upon love’s preserves, as made mere forms like this seem slight indeed.

“Oh! yes,” he said, stammering with shyness, “when it is done, you shall have it, if you care about it.”

“Thanks very much;” said Eugenia, aware that she had spoken roughly, but far too pre-occupied to alter her tone; it was easier to let the subject drop. And then again she tried to eat, but she could not: she was another

woman from that Eugenia whose breakfast hour, at Shortlands farm, was wont to be so placid and so healthy.

At last a period was put to her blunders by the entrance of Anne and May, equipped for tennis; and Eugenia was not conscious of the searching observation in Anne's gaze. "Well," thought that young lady, "she looks something for 'Mr. Jones' to be proud of, at all events."

Although Eugenia was so much older than Anne, her rare grace and her untroubled beauty gave her sometimes an aspect of almost childish simplicity. Her eyes had that infantile candour which many women—but few mothers—retain till they are old, whilst Anne's dark eyes had never looked other than now: they had peered out from her lace cradle into the baby world, with much this piercing Israelitish gaze in which they sought Eugenia's lovely face.

"I am glad to find Lady Shortlands so much

herself again," said Anne, "you will be quite surprised when you return to her."

(—"Return to her?" of course: Eugenia recognised the inevitable at once. How was it that it had not occurred to her, that her day must be spent in her aunt's room?)

"I wish I could take your place with her," said pretty May, in her gentle cooing voice, "you are such a much better tennis-player than I am."

(—"Tennis-player?" of course, again. They were going to play: well! at least she would be able to see them from her aunt's window—would he play with them? *would they take him away?*)

The first sensation of the madness of jealousy—the unreasoning and sudden jealousy of unreasoning and sudden love—is perhaps, of all sensations, the one that most thoroughly surprises us in ourselves. A short time ago, we had despised it with all that there

was generous in our nature; now we can make no resistance, only endure it.

Eugenia stood up and leaned against a side-board placed near the window, which was open on to the terrace—there might be comfort in the air! As she stood so, her heart told her, almost before her ears, that the young men—no! that one young man had returned from his bathe and was striding across the hall behind her. She vaguely heard Anne Jefferies suggesting to her that she should “make a good breakfast and try to keep up,”—a piece of advice which had a ridiculous sound in its present context,—and then a noisy party entered the room, by a door close to where she was standing. She drew in her breath and turned, the searching light still full upon her face, and saw Buck there—the same light full on his.

Ah! that first safe meeting with the beloved, which undoes all the doubts, which proves the

dream was true and all the fancied perils vain : when other people matter so little because he is come. Sleep overpast, and waking, and yet no change!—

In his manhood and his freshness—and his silence—Arthur Jarvis looked worthy to be so desired. His splendid health had quite put away from him that hot and tumbled look, which had come over him after the ball ; his bath had brought the sanguine hues again to his sunburnt face and his square finger-tips. As for Boville and Crossley and Vane, who perhaps looked well enough too, had Eugenia had eyes left to view them with, she saw them no more, than—at that one moment—Buck saw Anne and May. But he was, as always, less completely at his ease than Eugenia, the more so now that he was stolidly awake to the significance of their proceedings of the previous night, and Britishly sensible that she might think him “a bit of a fool.”

“Why have you burst in upon our maiden meal like this, you bears?” said Anne; “we thought, and hoped, you had been thrown your buns three hours ago.”

“Buns are not enough;” said Vane,—“not even *Bath* buns, which, you’d say, ours were,—we want to batten on boars’ heads at least—*à propos* of boars, where’s Tomlinson?”

Buck laughed: he saw that pun, which was an unusually poor one for Vane; his laugh made Eugenia aware how intently, and to the exclusion of all other perceptions, she had been contemplating him: it was as if a clock should suddenly strike when the clockmaker was watching its works. Her own! whom she had last seen sleeping as if he were dead; with his commonplace young soul alive in him again now, and looking, commonplacedly and very hungrily, out of his dear grey eyes.

“By George,” he said in a voice for her ear alone, as he came so close to her that he

touched her dress: "I'm as hungry as a hound: make me some breakfast, Jinny, will you?" and he planted himself down at the table and squared his elbows, turning his close-cropped bullet head towards her, with the wet hair in curls and points for her inspection.

Eugenia sat down again beside him: Anne and May sat down too. Boville and Crossley and Vane joined in chaffing Chatteris for his laziness; but Eugenia and Buck took no part in the chaffing.

"Sugar?" she said, as she gave him his tea.

"Rather, and the tea very strong—and cream."—With such a look at her face!

It was all just as common as the ground and just as unknown and as sweet as heaven.

Although Eugenia could not eat, Buck could—with added zest:—and she was satisfied with watching him. This creature, that she had

appropriated, seemed to her so wonderful and strange.

Buck enjoyed his breakfast, he ate all manner of good things, fish and eggs and *foie gras*, and crunched his toast the while, like a young ogre. He was never so splendidly happy as when he knew that somebody was anxious for his comfort before that of all others—especially if he were eating what he liked at the moment.

“There are none of your name-sake cakes, for you,” said Eugenia.

“Never mind that,” said Buck, with magnanimous allowance, “I put away plenty of them when I was a kid.”

. . . “To think,” Eugenia thought, “that he had ever been a little child !” . . .

Buck’s friend Crossley—who, as we know, had glimpses of decent feeling—had once asked Buck—to whom such glimpses were unknown—what was his great idea of happiness; and

Buck had answered, without hesitation, on the principles of his own rudimental philosophy, that it was “to have some woman about him always, who liked him awfully”— premising of course, such accessories as luxury, wealth and leisure, without which he could form no mental image of his lordly self.

His mother had spoiled him; vulgar girls had “gone green about him,” and not been too “proud or fine,” to show him “what a chap they thought him:” and now that this love of Eugenia’s had come to him, he was disposed to treat it in much the same way as their fancy, to put its rainbow cloud about him for warmth as if it were a frieze great-coat. He liked Eugenia to give him his breakfast, with the same liking with which he liked “Miss Mary” at the “Rose and Thorn” to light his cigar: and he liked that she should do so in the presence of others.

What with his happiness, and the way he

“loitered,” as Anne told him, he outate the appetite and outstayed the patience of all the rest; and so found himself at last—without premeditation—alone in Eugenia’s company; for she made no feint of stirring till he had finished. Her place was by his side.

“Well,” he said, throwing off reserve, as Anne and May stepped out upon the terrace, while the other men went to put on their tennis-flannels, “how’s the old girl—eh?”—

Eugenia was acclimatised to this mode of speaking of her aunt, by now; and she answered that Lady Shortlands was better, just as if he had inquired for her in the most delicate and tactful way. “But,” she added, “I shall have to be with her all day long.”

“No, damn it, will you though?” said Buck taking her hand. Now that they were alone, he saw no reason why he should be either choice in his language, or circumspect in his actions: and he unbuttoned his blue waist-

coat and stretched his magnificent legs, with an outrageous air of being quite at his ease.

“ All the day long ; ” said Eugenia again, looking at his hot face, aglow with exercise and friction and breakfast : while she could see him beside her, even his prospective absence seemed an unreal thing—she spoke with no regret.

“ And you don’t care a blow, I’ll be sworn : ” he said, mistaking her tone.

Eugenia did not answer in words, but she lifted his hand to her lips, as it lay upon her own, and kissed it softly. He was well pleased.

“ Come out with me upon the terrace, while I have a weed,” he said persuasively : but at that moment, Anne looked in at the window, (having previously remarked to May, that she ‘ would do “ the rose looking in at the window,” for which *rôle* she was admirably suited ’), and Lord Shortlands came in at the door—fortunately two seconds later.

“Come out Mr. Jarvis!” said Anne in her trenchant but not unattractive way, twining her hand in the creepers; “Come out, for nobody’s sake but your own—like Mr. Pickwick, that must have most weight with you—come out! I’m sure you ought to have some shaking-up at once, after that breakfast of yours—you must try to amalgamate those various viands or they’ll get the better of you, to a certainty. Go and classicise yourself: we are waiting and shall only allow you a quarter of an hour to change.”—

“She is asking for you now, dearest niece,” said Lord Shortlands to Eugenia, “if you have finished your breakfast, will you go to her at once?”

Just at this idle moment, just by these common needs, the lovers were parted: with nothing yet said of all the speech that would have filled a lifetime, with nothing yet known but the nearness and the hand-pressure that are such

small symbols and yet can so completely consecrate a life.

“All right,” said Buck to Anne. He rose and joined her “straight away:” he had a mighty horror of Lord Shortlands.

“I will come with you,” said Eugenia to her uncle, with one wistful look after her lover, as he strode out of the window. Did she feel, at all, in that instant that he was taken away from her for ever, that whom the night had joined, the day, while yet so young, was to put asunder?

CHAPTER VI.

IMMORTAL.

EUGENIA had much need of patience in her day's nursing. The morning had grown hot and bright, and it brought clearer before Lady Shortlands' eyes the havoc that illness was making in her life. She had always been a woman of enormous correspondence. An early riser at home, she had, for years past, kept her mornings at her own disposal and devoted them to reading and answering letters. "Lady Shortlands' news," and "Lady Shortlands' epigrams" were the best salt of many a breakfast table. Her postbag of this morning happened to be one of more than usual interest, and the subject of her own seizure formed a topic on which she was anxious to dictate sundry witty-

cisms which had occurred to her during her sleepless hours, for the edification of her daughters and their circles.

Eugenia had, of course, to be her amanuensis, and much that she was bidden to despatch was of a kind the most distasteful to herself: for instance, there was Lady Shortlands' postscript to her own letter to her mother, which, while it would seem to Mrs. Brand to be written in jest, held—for Eugenia's ears,—some very unpalatable earnest.

“Dearest sister,” was what Lady Shortlands dictated, to Mrs. Brand, when Eugenia had read her the literal account of the past night’s terrors, which she was sending; “I have had ‘a fit! a vulgar, horrible, abominable, ungentle ‘fit! and I have been bled for it, just as a ‘drunken woman might be by the parish doctor. ‘Whatever remained in my veins of the milk ‘of human kindness, which still flows through ‘yours (and makes your life so colourless) has,

‘ I suppose, been drained away : for I’m as cross
‘ as a crusader ! And conceive the cause of my
‘ fit—I really thought I had more presence of
‘ mind.—It was nothing in the world but a
‘ shock to my *æstheticism* at seeing Eugenia
‘ march into supper, like a daughter of the regi-
‘ ment, with a scarlet-pated lout of a soldier-
‘ laddie, when I was expecting to see her limp-
‘ ing decently to her place with my own specially
‘ selected cripple. Whether the soldier’s red
‘ head disagreed (the house-poet, here, would
‘ say ‘jarred’) with my lobster-salad, to which
‘ of course Shortlands attributes the fit entirely,
‘ (so like a man, isn’t it? to be insensible to
‘ these feminine fine feelings of ours—so coarse
‘ and so indelicate!)—but which, I assure you, I
‘ only looked at ; or whether the said soldier—
‘ whom I only looked at too—is the devil (of
‘ whom I never could endure the thought, be-
‘ cause I believe in him so devoutly), I leave
‘ you to determine, for you are an adept in

‘health and divinity—I mean ill-health and the ‘other thing. I think perhaps he is the devil : ‘there seems to be a sort of bewitchment about ‘him, which Eugenia feels. If so, I’m safe at ‘present, despite my flurry, for the woman to his ‘liking is——”

Lady Shortlands paused : Eugenia held her pen suspended in the air, until she heard what was coming : she would not write of her lover’s love for her so roughly.—After a moment, Lady Shortlands went on, with renewed zest—“the ‘woman to his liking, is, evidently, *Miss Anne Jefferies* !

‘I am coming back to Shortlands to-‘morrow, in case of his fancy changing and ‘my catching sight of him again. I feel that ‘I deserve my vulgar ailment, for coming near ‘these horrible people at all. Oh ! my own bed-‘room : with the miniatures upon its screens ‘and that good scent of the old lace and the ‘old days in it. There is nothing like it here :

‘ the whole place smells of chintz and glazing.
‘ All the same the *housekeeper* does her best for
‘ me according to her *lights*—very magnificent
‘ lights — gas-lights — duplex-lights — electric
‘ lights—flarers—not a bit like the modest wax
‘ candle-lights *we* were brought up by. Parfitt
‘ is ‘ my only joy,’ as some poet said of ‘ Phyllis :’
‘ I can’t say that she’s ‘ *coy*,’ as ‘ Phyllis ’ was,
‘ but she’s very funny . . . I let her go to sleep
‘ and then wake her up . . . I don’t sleep . . .
‘ I . . .’

Lady Shortlands’ voice ceased. As if the mention of Parfitt’s sleep had lulled her, she had fallen asleep herself.

But Eugenia did not wake her. Before she commenced the latter paragraph, her attention had died suddenly: she still wrote automatically on, her hand transcribing what her ears received, but she did not know what she was writing. Her consciousness was closed, when she had written those most unexpected words,

—“Miss Anne Jefferies;”—words which revealed to her a possibility that froze her heart. Up to that moment, certainly, she had written with some distaste: it seemed like blasphemy, to register the beloved’s auburn curls as his “scarlet-pate,” to call him a “lout of a soldier-laddie:” but she felt that she was bound to write what Lady Shortlands told her, by the claim of her helplessness—if indeed she had been, at all, the cause of it—and she felt too that she could trust her mother with her own sister’s sarcasm undiluted—that a word from herself would be sufficient antidote. She relied also on her belief in Buck: “when mother sees him,” she thought, “and knows how well I love him, we shall see what Aunt Agatha’s strictures weigh!” So that, to Lady Shortlands’ discontent, she had even smiled in writing down her words.

Lady Shortlands indeed, had not originally

meant to end her sentence with Anne Jefferies' name; she was going to tell tales of Eugenia, wishing to make "the creature" write a kind of confession of her own behaviour, while she watched the effect. But perhaps the devil, who figured so much in her letter, stepped to her bed's head and prompted her, or perhaps she determined that it would be better to ignore Eugenia's folly altogether. At all events, she furthered her scheme with Anne, by deliberately substituting the heiress' name; and so satisfied was she with the immediate effect of that name on her amanuensis, that she gradually dropped, as we have seen, into the quiet and refreshing sleep, falsely assumed to be the portion of the just.

For as Eugenia wrote Anne Jefferies' name, her warm fair face had seemed to freeze and darken, as if the living heart that animated all its beauty had been plunged in ice; and when her pen ceased with Lady Shortlands'

dictation, she still clasped it, as she sat like a marble woman at the table.

And so sitting, listening on for Lady Shortlands' voice, there came to her a noise of light-blown laughter from the tennis-courts, at no great distance from the partly open window. She could detect the differences in its tone. There were a louder and a lighter voice, that were alike triumphant: Arthur Jarvis and his partner May had won the first set.

At last Eugenia rose, and moved softly to the window; with that impulse to probe her wound for which there always seem such chances bestowed on a lover. She pulled the blind aside, and looked down upon the lawns, chequered in the sunshine with their lovely borders of shadow. The long, green centre-lawn, where no shadows were, and where the net was stretched and the white lines were drawn, was vacant now. The victors and the vanquished were resting on the shadowed

turf, and formed a very pleasing group as they reclined there in their thirsty ease.

Their occupation at the moment was not heroic, though it was perhaps Homeric. They were crowded together, watching Vane intently, as he made them a wonderful American drink—a species of lemon-squash—which they were going to enjoy through straws; there was no tinge of sentiment in their proximity. Pretty May was resting on a garden-seat, with Dick Crossley, in attendance, balancing her racquet, as Buck had balanced Eugenia's: Captain Boville, who had been reading the papers, was seated beside her, and James Chatteris was stretched on the grass at her feet. Buck and Anne—the active members of the party—were squeezing lemons for Vane, who was busy with bright glasses and ice and liquids in gleaming bottles, upon the marble which some old sculpture-fragments lent him for a table, in his improvised *restaurant*.

Eugenia scarcely saw the rest of them: but she saw Buck and Anne together; and she saw that Anne was occupied with Buck himself, much more than with the lemon-squeezing. She could not have said how it was that she saw this, but she did see it unerringly; the fact was there, but Eugenia mistook the motive. And as for Buck he looked to Eugenia's eyes, a man to be desired and obeyed. He was conspicuous in his flannels, and his colouring was vivid enough for distance. A hundred yards away from him, you could see that he was gloriously well and radiantly happy, and no doubt in his supreme health and happiness lay the secret of his young mastery over Eugenia. She gazed at him with an earnestness that left her no scope even for longing to be with him, and the first sensation to which she awoke was a stupid and unreasoning disquietude, born from her overvaluing a trivial thing. Could any one be with

him and not love him? and then, What was it Lady Shortlands had dictated? Anne's contempt for him, her *nonchalance*, her charm, were not these persuasions of the most attractive kind? . . . And if Anne should love him, how much she could do for him, what a position she could give him, what luxuries, what wealth!—Eugenia had nothing in her hands to offer him but her heart and her beauty.

She turned and looked back, down the long room. Lady Shortlands lay with her eyes shut: but if she were asleep, her sleep was of the lightest; for she yawned sometimes, and shifted her position. Eugenia dared not leave her. The room looked dark and peaceful and lonely, with its beautiful appointments and that one, small, old woman lying on the rich bed, for central figure, making her pact with death in such a solemn silence. No: Eugenia must stay with her aunt. With the noiselessness of dread, she drew a chair to the window,

and sat down to watch again, the light first blinding her eyes afresh as she did so.

Buck was not one to be long without romping, wherever he was ; and presently, by way of being funny, he spurted some lemon-juice into the patient Crossley's eye. Whence ensued symptoms of a free fight, in which Anne seemed disposed to take an interest ; —Anne, who had no brothers or sisters and held all such amusement in abhorrence ! (But then Anne had detected Eugenia's head at the window, as she peered round the white blind.) —Siding with Crossley, to that gentleman's delighted surprise, she dexterously possessed herself of the sugar-tongs, and took a lump of sparkling ice from the glass bowl, which she slipped down Lieutenant Jarvis' neck, just as he bent backwards to parry his adversary's lemon.

The action was so entirely out of Anne's usual manner, so precisely what she would have condemned as "larky" in another woman, that

Eugenia held her breath with amazement. It spoke for Anne's dignity as a rule, that her partisanship struck Eugenia as seriously unjust and unfair, instead of merely as ridiculous. She would have been still more amazed could she have heard the dialogue that ensued, of which she could distinguish little more than the shouts of, "Well put, Miss Jefferies!" and "Oh, Anne!" mingling with Buck's balked and crestfallen laughter.

"You'd better look out," he shouted, with shy but savage glee, "or by Jove! I'll spoil that sporting new jacket of yours, which you think so 'down-the-road.'"

"I should like to see you touch me!" said Anne contemptuously, clasping her slim hands behind her back, while Crossley snapped a lemon-pip from his fingers, which caught his gallant foe upon the cheek.

"Should you, though?" said Buck. The retort and the lemon-pip together emboldened

and provoked him, and he made a dash at her which she could have eluded easily, but she actually let him touch the sash of her dress, and then looked up at him and smiled in his face.

“ You dare no further ! ” she said. .

“ Don’t I ?—you don’t know me ! ” said Buck, whose head was close to hers : “ Why *I’d kiss you for a fiver !* ”

Anne’s instinct was to drench him summarily into silence, with his share of the lemon-squash, and then tell Captain Boville to kick him, but in a flash—as she turned—she caught the expression of Eugenia’s face, and felt that the moment was come for which she had been scheming, and was at no price to be lost. She absolutely put her fingers on Buck’s shoulder, wet with the melting ice, and faced him round towards May ; her words undid the caress of her action, but then Eugenia did not hear her words.

“Here is a young warrior,” she said, “whose ardour I have tried, in vain, to quench. He has a piece of ice down his back, the size of a half-crown, as you can witness one and all, and he has narrowly escaped a lemon-pip in his right eye! The deluded pip took his head for a lemon and lodged here instead” :—with that, she flicked his curls—a stage flick, for she would not have touched them for the world :—“this, by the way: the fact remains that his ardour is *not* quenched, but that he makes me a magnanimous offer of truce. He says he will ‘*kiss me for a fiver.*’ As I should particularly like him to try, because of what he would get if he did, I am going”—here she twitched off Buck’s striped cap—“to send round the hat for him, in the assurance that Miss Mary Agnes Buxton, Captain Boville, Mr. Richard Crossley, Mr. Henry Vane and Mr. James Chatteris will contribute the small sum of one pound sterling apiece, for reserved seats

to see the entertainment.—Applause! where's the applause, Mr. Crossley?"

The applause duly followed, and, meanwhile, she concluded, for Buck's ear alone, in a tone which seemed to scorch him: "If they won't, I shall send in the footmen to ask Lady Shortlands *and Miss Brand* to contribute; and I fear, if we depend upon Miss Brand's resources, that—much as she would appreciate the performance—it will be likely to fall through."

Under this torrent of words and allusions—which left him unaware how much was known, and which he was quite powerless to answer or to stem—Buck became crimson and awkward. Captain Boville's face taught him more than Anne's phrases, and there were shafts that pierced even to his intelligence. He saw that Miss Jefferies was sarcastic, and he knew that he had said an odious say; but yet she did not behave as he had fancied she would have done if she were angry, and, to complete

his puzzledom, she kept her hand upon his shoulder all the time she mocked him. And May too was astonished at Anne's *tirade*, and only half liked her manner. She knew the attraction of that impertinence for men, and, like Eugenia—with her lesser love—she felt that Buck was being rather hardly used.

“Oh Anne! *Pax!*” she said. “Is that good Latin, Mr. Vane? My schoolboy brothers always call out ‘*Pax*,’ when they have had enough of quarrelling. I don’t know,” she added to Crossley, for she did not dare speak to Buck, “whether you *real* soldiers are not too proud to do so: so I will do it for you. *Pax*, Anne! we are all so thirsty; Mr. Chatteris is eating grass, and you have been wasting the ice!”

“Well, Ganymede,” said Anne to Vane, “is the cup ready?”

“You must have none,” said Vane, “it is a loving-cup.”

May clapped her hands : she would punish Anne ! “ The combatants must drink out of it together, first : ” she said, “ it will be as good to see as the kiss, and it will save our pockets the *fiver* : if they won’t, they shall have none, and we shall insist upon the forfeit.”

Thus, after some persuasion—for she had not bargained for this—and amid great laughter, Anne Jefferies and Buck Jarvis put their lips to the big vessel in which Vane’s cup was brewed ; and drank as deep a draught as Tristram and Iseult, though not of love, and so their truce was sealed.

How did all this rough play—this intimate nearness of the beloved to another—look to our poor Eugenia ?

Lady Shortlands dozed on : and she had leisure left to watch it all, until tears stopped her sight—tears not so much of jealousy as of despair. Eugenia had never been used to spending bright summer days, a prisoner, indoors.

She was fitted for the sunlight and the lawns: her heart had been away with that group under the pleasant shade, but as it cast itself among them, it struck on pain. Had May behaved to Buck as Anne was doing, Eugenia would have felt nothing but an angry jealousy. May Buxton, one of many daughters, was little better dowered than herself, and far less capable. To May, as Lady Shortlands had divined, she never would have given up her lover without an effort—and it needed but an effort to retain him—but what if Anne had set her heart upon him, Anne with her brilliant wits and her great fortune? As Eugenia watched this sport, increasing sorrow to her soul, a pain, almost beyond bearing, succeeded gradually to her momentary dread. He seemed so happy, so occupied, so thoroughly at his ease; he yielded with such self-surrender to Anne's touch; her hand was on his shoulder, where Eugenia's rounded arms

had lain, her lips were at the brim of the same cup with his, and he let himself be appropriated without resistance. Something of the truth of his adaptability entered like iron into her heart. Yes: he would enjoy life to the full as much with Anne, as with herself. If Anne loved him . . . if Anne loved him.

A tremor came upon Eugenia's limbs, as she sat there at the window. She tried to face the thought again ;—“If Anne loved him.” Well! could anything, in the whole world, be better for him than the love of this clever girl, whose power could bring him all he liked? “Oh! if it should be for the best,” she thought, “God, help me to bear it! help me to bear it.” Her tears fell fast like rain: from a very hell of jealous passion, she passed into a purgatory of reasoning, only to deserve the joyless heaven of self-denial. “It is better it should be at once,” she said aloud, “before he has learned to love me much:”—of herself she never thought:

whatever she should suffer, it would be for him.

While Lady Shortlands made her pact with death for a little more life, Eugenia was making her pact with life for a little more love—if it should not spoil the happiness of the beloved. She loved him, at that moment, deeper far than in his presence, but she comprehended him better. Her mind was awake; she tried to argue down her heart. “Why,”—she said to herself,—“why should it be so hard for me to let him go? What is the nature of the link between us? It is only a passion.”—The colour came into her cheeks again: she dried her sudden tears, indignant with herself, and sat on blankly staring at the window-blind which she had dropped over the pane, and seeing nothing; for voluntarily she shut out the sight of his treason.—“What has he done to me?” she went on, “that he should possess me so? It is not as if I were seventeen. At

seventeen one is let dream these dreams, one is let love, with one's whole life. I never dreamed them then, I never cared: and is this my dream, come too late? Is it the realler because it thrills in every nerve of my frame? or is it only a young girl's sick fancy that has lost its way, and come astray into a woman's heart?" She felt her very temples glow, with their first flush of shame—shame for the purest thought that ever befell life, that he should be so dear, that she should be so loving. She clasped her hands and pressed them tight together till she hurt herself. They were not hot or cold: there was no bodily fever, yet, that had taken hold upon her royal health: with a weaker woman this might have been illness,—"nerves,"—with Eugenia it was passion and conviction. She was quite well, only—"I am a fool," she said aloud, in a hard voice, unlike her own; "a fool."

Lady Shortlands opened her eyes. "Why

are you gone so far away?" she asked in a querulous tone. In her faintness, and to her dimmed sight, the room seemed endless: it opened out into a long *vista*, at the end of which was a blurred Eugenia.

"I thought you were asleep, Aunt Agatha," she said, coming back to the bedside. There was no caress in her voice and no confidence, she was not accustomed to the capricious humours of sick people, for Mrs. Brand was patient and silent.

Lady Shortlands resented this dry solace. "So I was," she said, "until you woke me up muttering. Sitting there half a mile off, like a ghoul, and gibbering like an idiot, is enough to wake any one up. What was it you said?"

"Nothing," Eugenia answered stupidly; nor had she any notion that she had spoken her thought aloud.

"Most people say that;" said Lady Short-

lands with a musing irony: "only some people take more words to say it in than others."

At last Eugenia felt some secret spring of bitterness within herself that welled towards her aunt's causticity: she too had begun to think that words meant nothing. But the moment did not last. She could not help it that her nature was trustful and sweet. She sighed.

"Yes: shall I read to you, Aunt Agatha?" she asked presently.

"If you like, and if you *can*," said the old lady, who had been watching her, "anything is better than gibbering like a ghoul."

"There are no books here," said Eugenia looking round; "but there are plenty in my room: I will go and get one as soon as my uncle comes in."

The two women remained silent, trying to read each other's hearts, the echo of the voices from without reaching them faintly now and

then, through the open window : it sounded as if the girls were talking alone, the bass and tenor voices were gone out of the glee.

Lord Shortlands soon came back ; he could not keep away for long at a time, and he slept a great deal, by naps, so that he required no regular rest : when he appeared, Eugenia went at once to her room, to find a book to read aloud to her aunt.

As she entered her chapel-chamber, she started suddenly, as if she had seen a ghost ; on the table there was a white scrap of paper lying, which she hardly dared unfold : it was roughly sealed, with a great deal of wax and a very broad thumb that had impressed its grain upon the seal ; and it was directed to "Miss Brand" in pencil. She felt a sting of conscience : he had been writing her a letter, while she had been making up her mind, so calmly, to give him up. She sat down, and reverently, as if she were discovering a miracle, she un-

twisted the scrap of paper, which had been torn out of a pocket-book, and read :

“MY DEAR JINNY—Can’t you get leave for the picnic? Mrs. T. says we can picnic as ‘old Lady S. is all right now, and we shall be ‘best out of the way. I am to drive Miss J. in ‘a buggy : but I will put her off if you can come, ‘though she is very *keen* : ‘nuts on yours truly.’ ‘I’ve been with her all morning, and I should ‘think she’d got her cuffs pretty full by now. I ‘shall give this to the housemaid. Mind you ‘come if you can—bar rot : its my last whole ‘day. Do you know what these stars are ‘meant for? Guess : I’ll *tell* you some day. ‘*Think of me*, if you can’t come,

Yours up-hill and down-dale,

* * *

‘BUCK.’

‘P.S. “I shall give this to the housemaid,”—‘the housemaid’ was evidently very much in

Lieutenant Jarvis' thoughts, for he said this twice over.—“I’m not much of a scribe, but I’ll ‘write you another when we get back ; but I’m ‘not going to make any more paper stars. I’ll ‘come somehow. The tennis was rot. How’s ‘yourself?”

This epistle took Eugenia several minutes to read, although her eyes and her beating heart vied with each other to tell her its meaning speedily. There were some words that she could scarcely read, (for the writing was not of the best,) some that she did not understand, even when she had read them over and over ; for she had not yet mastered her lover’s language. “The picnic ;”—she gathered, from that word, that Mrs. Tomlinson had planned an expedition for her party in the afternoon, to leave the invalid’s surroundings more completely undisturbed. It was thoughtful of Mrs. Tomlinson, and naturally he was going

to it: at least naturally he was *asked* to go to it and, perhaps, as there was driving, he could not be spared. But then, that sentence about Anne. Well! she had seen it with her own eyes, she was glad that he was truthful. Eugenia did not understand the far-fetched slang, “has got her cuffs full by now,” and she did not like the “housemaid” or the “stars.” But she did like “think of me,” and she pressed the signature of his pet name to her lips.

Considering that there was no one word of real appreciative love in the whole letter—that it might have been written by a schoolboy to a cake-shop girl, or by a groom to a scullery-maid—it was astonishing that Eugenia should find so much comfort in it as she did: but then, her invention read the meaning into the words, and perhaps the secret of the letter’s power was, that, throughout it, Buck had never troubled, in the least, what she would think of it. Put into short-hand prose, it meant no

more than this: "You see the sort of fellow I am: I am not going to stop at home for you, and if you don't want me, I can amuse myself with somebody else—Miss Jefferies or perhaps the housemaid;—but I'm yours, while I'm here, if you like me, and, if not, you can let me alone." That was what an outsider would have made of the letter, just an impertinence—neither more nor less—but then an outsider would not have been reading with Eugenia's reverent eyes, or interpreting with Eugenia's loving heart.

Her first impulse was to answer the note at once; she took from her portfolio a sheet of the paper which had "Ashbank" stamped on it in silver, and she tore off the decorated side which she knew he would prefer. Upon this she wrote, in her clear, characteristic hand, "I cannot come, but I do think of you. E.B." Then it occurred to her that she had no means

of sending him the note that were not vulgar means, distasteful to her honest heart.

Eugenia rose from the writing-table, and went, as her wont was, to the window. The same instinct sent her, physically, to fresh air which sent her, spiritually, to God. She stood there with Buck's crumpled scrawl in her hand, and gazed down at the writing, which magnetically brought her something of the masterfulness of the man. It was unlike any other writing she had ever seen, and she could not know that it was only a little worse than the generality of soldiers' "fists." No: she could not answer it. Mechanically she stooped to the small dark bookcase, in the corner by the window, for she dared not stay, and took an armful of the neat morocco-bound or yellow-papered volumes, without looking at them. She thrust Buck's note between the pages of one of them, and destroyed her own; then, after one more wistful glance from

the window, she turned to leave the room. How lovely the lawns were lying in the full heat of summer noon, how sweet the blossoms of the creepers were, how glossy the ivy leaves, how silver-blue the distant sea! Now, again, it was high tide, and the Hard was flooded to the terrace steps. She glanced to her right, along the downs and uplands with their woods and growth of harvest, and whispered to herself :

*“Ah! would I were in those green fields at play,
‘Not pent on shipboard, this delicious day!’”*

“Delicious day,” indeed : it was only marred by some one whistling, from the smoking-room beneath, in shrill decided tone, “We’ll never come back no more.” She did not know that it was Buck, standing with his broad back to the open window, and his legs stretched out, and his arms down upon the table, yawning over a comic paper. He never even expected

a message from Eugenia, he knew she could not join the picnic.

When she came out of her room, with the books under her arm, she met Sir Edmund Trefusis who was walking to and fro in the corridor. She had no wish to see him, for his own sake, but when he joined her she felt that an opportunity was offered, to undeceive him, at last, and to send Buck an answer to his note at the same time.

With the nervous feeling that she was going to deal a severe home-thrust to Sir Edmund's pride, she said to him quickly "Are you going to this picnic?"

He shook his head. "Not I," he answered, "I do nothing but read and lounge, till after luncheon; you have no time for lounging, but I see you are going to read too."

"Yes," she said absently, "I am going to read aloud to my aunt."

"What are you going to read to her?"

Eugenia had not thought of that ; she looked at the back of one of the books and read the name off it : “‘ Tom Jones,’ ” she said.

Sir Edmund started and stared : then, understanding Eugenia’s want of enlightenment, he quietly possessed himself of the volumes ; and was going to give back only two of them to her innocent keeping. But Buck’s note happened to be in the pages of one of those he had taken, and she insisted on their being all returned to her : “ I must have those books,” she said.

“ But will you promise not to read them ? ” said Sir Edmund.

“ Oh yes ! ” she answered carelessly, “ if *you* tell me not to.” She did not think of the weight of her words ; she added what she was really anxious about, in an abrupt manner. “ Sir Edmund,” she said, “ will you go down-stairs and give Mr. Jarvis a message for me ? ”

Her hurry might have meant anger quite as much as love. Sir Edmund bowed and waited.

“Tell him,” she said, still more hurriedly, “that I shall not go to the picnic: he had better drive Miss Jefferies.”

Sir Edmund felt in his heart a warmth of surprise and pleasure, quite the reverse of what Eugenia had intended him to feel. It cost her an effort to frame any message to her lover, for another’s lips; but she forced herself to send one because she wished Sir Edmund to perceive the terms of intimacy on which she stood with Buck. The presumption that he was to drive her, had she gone to the picnic, would, she thought, convey the truth at once to Sir Edmund’s sensitive nature. But a sensitive nature is unfortunately liable to receive other impressions besides those intended for it, and Sir Edmund gathered, from the ambiguous abruptness of her tone, that Jarvis had given her offence, by sending her perhaps an uncalled-for invitation to drive with him, and that she wanted a champion. Her

words might have been dictated by either intimacy or anger, but Sir Edmund's reading of them was authorised by the fact of her sending the message through *him*, for he was, to some extent, recognised at Ashbank as her suitor, and also by her commanding Buck to Anne, who certainly—Sir Edmund thought—would not be likely to encourage his impertinence. He did not know that, in the latter half of her sentence, Eugenia had been consulting Buck's future, to her own sorrow.

“I had better go and tell him at once,” he said, “for the carriages are here already.”

Eugenia could not understand his tone; she had half expected him to resent her message. She was, herself, so preoccupied with its real significance, that she could not comprehend its bearing another aspect: but, although he controlled the elation that he felt at being her courier, it was evident that he was not deeply

wounded, as she had feared—for truth's sake and her Arthur's—that he needs must be.

He was returning her the armful of books, when Anne and May came out of their rooms in full driving *toilette*: Anne thought he had been getting them for Eugenia from the library, and the action augured well. She was looking her very best and, as this supposition suggested itself to her, she became perfectly radiant.

When Eugenia had exchanged a few words with the two girls, she hastened back to her aunt's rooms, without speaking further to Sir Edmund. She meant this also for coolness, but to Anne, and perhaps to Sir Edmund too, it looked like the familiarity that ignores a formal greeting. There was a perfect web of small misunderstandings weaving itself among them.

Sir Edmund went downstairs into the hall, now crowded again with its Japanese screens

and *ormolu*, and presenting a very animated appearance although loud talking and loud laughter were alike hushed for fear of any echo reaching Lady Shortlands' room. Buck's jokes, indeed, could seldom be said out loud, and he and the rest of his fellows were clustered together, enjoying something whispered among themselves, with bursts of muffled laughter. Mr. Buck looked bigger and handsomer than ever—not to say “horsier” which would have been his own term—in another light suit and a fresh cotton tie; and Sir Edmund felt the contrast between them, as he limped across to the group.

“Is Trefusis coming?” said Buck aloud, “he don’t look much of a whip;” and he drew on some bright dogskin gloves, as he said it, with as defiant an air as if he were going to box in them.

Sir Edmund noticed the insolence of his manner and responded by an intellectual blow.

“Mr. Jarvis,” he said, “I have a message for you, from Miss Brand.”

“The deuce you have;” said Buck; although he flushed crimson, he was determined to seem unconcerned. He would not budge, but looked Sir Edmund straight in the face.

Boville and Crossley, however, politely moved away, though Buck knew them well enough to be sure that they kept within earshot.

“Miss Brand bids me tell you,” said Sir Edmund, as his breath quickened with anger, and his heightened tone gave Eugenia’s literal words a different ring to that her heart had put in them, “that she will not go to the picnic, and that you had better drive Miss Jefferies.”

There was no doubt, in view of his own note, that the message came from Eugenia. Boville and Crossley tittered, and Buck heard them; they gathered from Sir Edmund’s tone just what he had gathered himself from Eugenia’s

words, that this was meant to be, as Crossley put it, “a facer for Buck.” He was at first a little awed by the *hauteur* of Sir Edmund’s voice; he never could quite get the better of his respect for that “sixty thousand a year” for which he hated him; but when he heard his friends titter he at once became absolutely and brutally furious.

“I shall drive just who I damned please:” he said, with ungrammatical rudeness, and as, to judge by what he muttered next, he had not exhausted his expletives by that sample, Sir Edmund turned upon his heel and walked away.

In a very nasty temper—for the message, Boville said, had “got a rise out of him”—Buck strode up to May Buxton, where the two girls stood talking to Mrs. Tomlinson who had drifted down into the hall to start her party.

It was rather an unusual start for a picnic:

Vane was already suggesting “old shoes and rice.” Chatteris and Captain Boville were going to ride with Mr. Buxton, but the other men had planned to drive a pair of slight American trotting-traps, in each of which would be a lady. Mrs. Buxton thought it was “very odd” but the heat made her too languid to resist the scheme, and, as she was going herself in a *barouche* with Vane and there were so many outriders, she “supposed it would be all right.” She meant May to go with Dick Crossley, to whom she had taken a fancy, on finding out that she had been at school with his mother—so that, as she vaguely explained, “she was a sort of *aunt* of his”—and Anne was a match for Buck, and was moreover quite beyond Mrs. Buxton’s control at all times. But this arrangement, owing to Buck’s paroxysm of temper, was not quite the one put into force. “May I have the pleasure of driving *you*,

Miss Buxton?" he said, in a blunt manner that contrasted strangely with his formal words. He absolutely ignored Anne, who never forgave him; and May—who, in her turn, had not yet forgiven Anne her "unfair" treatment of him with the ice, and who had quite exhausted Crossley's companionship during the morning,—accepted his escort at once.

"Thank you, Mr. Jarvis;" she said, with a pretty little mock curtsey, which had its effect in restoring Buck's good-humour: "Now, Anne, you can give Mr. Crossley another singing lesson."

Thus, if only Lady Shortlands' bedroom had faced north instead of south, so that Eugenia could have witnessed the start, she would have seen her beloved driving May Buxton, of whom scarcely her vanity and certainly not her intelligence could be jealous, instead of Anne whom she both admired and feared.

But the change could have brought her no satisfaction, had she known how well all parties were pleased with this arrangement, and how much more sympathetic May Buxton was to prove to her Lieutenant.

They were off at last—for Mrs. Buxton could not rescind her permission to May to drive because one of the young men happened to be her escort instead of another, though Mr. Arthur John Jarvis' mother had not been Mrs. Buxton's schoolfellow,—the trotting-traps and the glistening *barouche* shining in the full noonday sun, and glinting along the smooth drive, between the shrubs and flower-borders: and Sir Edmund and Mrs. Tomlinson, (whose looks were rather “bothered” and “down-at-heel”) were left alone in the great hall, with its soft-piled rugs and its quiet. They were as silent and as grave as if they had despatched a funeral instead of a picnic party.

“I’m afraid,” said Mrs. Tomlinson shame-

facedly, "it's very dull indeed for you, Sir Edmund." She could not shift him off, on to "Ashbank's resources," because he knew them already far better than she did herself.

He smiled. "If I can be of the slightest service to—to Lady Shortlands," he said, hesitating a little before the name, "believe me, I am only too well pleased to stay. I trust you think of me no longer as a three days' guest, I think I may venture to say that I feel at home at Ashbank."

Mrs. Tomlinson bridled a little: she was glad that her new butler and other not unimportant functionaries of her overstocked household should hear this speech of her friend's, while they were still noiselessly busy in the outer hall and corridors, arranging rugs, straps, gloves and whips.

"Of course," she answered, in a loud and hospitable tone: "*you* are quite one of our-

selves.”—Which was not exactly what Sir Edmund had meant.

“What was that message you were giving Mr. Jones?” she went on—Mrs. Tomlinson was fully persuaded by now that Arthur Jarvis’ name was really “Jones.”

“Only that Miss Brand would not go to the picnic: I fancy he had sent her a sort of invitation to drive with him in his buggy.”

“*Indeed?* Well, *you* were quite the right person to be entrusted with *that* message.”

This was Mrs. Tomlinson’s tactful manner of, what she called, “feeling where the land lay,”—a garbled metaphor, which she managed to make very expressive.

Sir Edmund, abnormally sensitive as he was, recognised the pleasure to be got out of such a comment, though he did not like it. He thought it was irreverent. “Miss Brand has done me a great honour:” he said softly.

He was alluding to her having made him

her messenger, and the meaning which he could not but attach to the distinction; but Mrs. Tomlinson imagined that he meant much more, and she was determined not to seem behind-hand in discrimination.

“Oh!” she said, archly, wagging her head, “a little bird has told *me*, that her predicament for you,”—(Mrs. Tomlinson perhaps meant “predilection,”)—“is a *fait accompli*: I think myself that the *honour* is for you to confer.”

It was a very snobbish and a very vulgar speech, and Sir Edmund hated it: but all the same it comforted his heart, and he was predisposed to be grateful to Mrs. Tomlinson, regarding her as a potent ally.

“I hope,” he said timidly, “that I shall have your good word with Lady Shortlands?”

Mrs. Tomlinson bowed. “You shall, indeed,” she said, “*and* with the Duchess!”

The Duchess of Durham had nothing in the world to do with the disposal of her

cousin's fair hand, as Sir Edmund knew perfectly well: she was simply that irresistible gilt vane, which Mrs. Tomlinson could not forbear to flourish, now and then, upon the steeples of her speech. As this special steeple might be consolidated into a church spire, Sir Edmund accepted even the Duchess at the top of it; but he had an absurd momentary glimpse of a wedding, in his mind's eye, "the Duchess," talking to "the Bishop," and Mrs. Tomlinson herself presiding, in a sort of emasculated surplice.

"And now, *dear* Sir Edmund," said Mrs. Tomlinson,—feeling, perhaps, with the true instinct of the orator, that anything after "the Duchess" might prove an anticlimax,—"you know my morning duties: and you must add to them, to-day, my poor friend's illness and the anxiety and grief which that entails: all Ashbank is at your disposal,"—she could not resist her *formula*, as she glanced with pardon-

able pride across the hall, to the music room with its precious instruments and folios, and the library, on the central tables of which, lay every journal and magazine in the kingdom—“and I shall do my best—my very best,” she concluded, as she drifted vaguely off with her lace dangling from her head, “to procure you an interview with Eugenia.” (“Yes,” she thought to herself, “‘*Eugenia*,’ if you please, Sir Edmund, and not ‘Miss Brand’ and not ‘Lady Trefusis.’”)

Sir Edmund remained in the hall, his kindly smile still lighting up his kindly face. It was all so transparent that he could not be annoyed at it—“My poor friend’s illness,”—how Lady Shortlands would have resented that utterance! Sir Edmund knew that, should he ever succeed in making Eugenia his wife, it would go hard with Mrs. Tomlinson if she did not look upon herself as both Eugenia’s mother-in-law and his! But, beneath the glamour of that

hope, he resented nothing for himself,—not even Buck's rudeness, though he disliked the thought that so ill-mannered and foul-mouthed a lout should ever have danced with Eugenia. Sir Edmund made allowances even for Buck! His conduct had, no doubt, sprung from a passion of jealousy, the poor fellow fancied himself head over ears in love with “the beautiful Miss Brand,” and his wrath was but another token of Sir Edmund’s universal recognition as her favourite.

But there succeeded the question, which he was not conceited enough to answer in the affirmative: Could he boast that he was indeed her favourite? Was it possible that she should feel drawn towards him? Why not handsome Boville? Why not clever Vane?

Among the abominations which Mrs. Tomlinson had introduced into the Ashbank hall was a vast panel of looking-glass, near to the outer door—on the further side of the *portière*

which was now drawn aside,—a panel, of which her lady guests would almost invariably avail themselves for self-inspection, as they came in or went out, while they shrugged their shoulders over their hostess' want of taste. When Sir Edmund, in his musings, sat down on one of the carved ivory chairs ranged against the tapestry hangings, he was opposite this mirror at an angle; and, just as his thoughts inclined to self-depreciation, he saw, reflected in it, a splendid woven warrior overhead, of colossal size and ruddy countenance, whom the sunlight detached weirdly from the broidered scene. Traversing, with admiration, this reflected figure, his eyes alighted on his own image, seated beneath it in the shadow, pale and wan. He was looking fatigued and weak; the iron that he wore made his attitude one of stiffness and constraint. Naturally, after so much anxiety and such a restless night, he appeared more ill than usual, and he could

certainly not have espied himself under less favourable circumstances than beneath this pictured warrior, and with the vision of that merry group of sunburnt officers still in his memory.

“I must get rest,” he thought suddenly, “I must be well before I speak to her. It is this aching in my wretched limbs that makes me tired. What woman, in her prime of beauty, would look to-day, with any sort of love, on such a thing as I am—a white-faced, unkempt cripple? I must not see her this morning. There is time, and she has enough of illness now; the thought of an invalid husband would be more than she could bear—she likes strength.”

An involuntary sob rose in his throat as he forced himself to postpone the interview with Eugenia upon which Mrs. Tomlinson had set her heart. “What; could he not trust the eyes of her clear soul?” he asked himself; but his

reason answered, “You need have no fear of her generosity ; it is not that : but you should make no appeal to her pity. You should come to her with sufficient fortitude to bear a rebuff. An assent that compassion urges, can bring no blessing : be persuaded, get out of the way and rest. Meet her, as far as you are able, like a strong man—for your sake and her own.” The result of this generous cogitation was that Sir Edmund Trefusis went to his own apartments to rest, just while Mrs. Tomlinson, who was prompter in her movements than he had imagined, was scheming to throw Eugenia in his way for a decisive interview.

Eugenia was herself only too anxious for such an opportunity ; she was not a woman who wore her heart upon her sleeve, and it would be difficult for her to tell Sir Edmund what was in that heart, without a conversation in assured quiet : she wanted the interview

therefore, although she hardly thought it possible, after sending her message to Buck by his agency, that he should need it to learn that her affections were set elsewhere and her first love out of his reach once and for ever. Circumstances seemed to favour Mrs. Tomlinson's scheme, for when, by Dr. Burroughes' permission, she made her way to the door of Lady Shortlands' room, she found that she was actually to be admitted, and that the old lady, although weak and excited, was in the greatest good-humour. It was not so much the Doctor or the Ashbank *consommé* that had animated her ladyship afresh, as her amusement at the books which Eugenia had brought with her from her room; she was as charmed as Sir Edmund had been distressed, at the sight of them.

"I must see that Tomkins woman,"—Lady Shortlands had devised this pleasing title for her hostess, since her seizure—"if she ventures

near me. The idea of putting ‘Tom Jones’ and those French adventures into the apartment of a chaste vestal like Eugenia. It is too delightful.” She did “Mrs. Tomkins” the justice to suppose the literature accidental, but of all the books that Eugenia had brought, Lady Shortlands—who was “very particular what people read,” (and knew them all by heart!)—found only *one* permissible for reading out loud. It was “*La peau du lion*,” and her ladyship, who was conversant with every French novel under the sun—and as a general rule, the further *under* the sun they were, the more she enjoyed them,—was glad that Eugenia should read some of it, though she did not herself care two straws for the story. That passage for instance in which Tonayrion’s swagger is unmasked, and again Servian’s reflections on Estelle’s infatuation,—“*tant de beauté, d'esprit et de grace, deviendra-t-il la conquête de ce fanfaron?*”—these seemed to

Lady Shortlands very applicable to Eugenia's "nonsense." She was delighted with "*ce fanfaron*:" it expressed "Mr. Jones" capitally, she thought,—and very likely it did, only Eugenia did not listen to what she was reading, and was holding the only profession "*ce fanfaron*" had ever made her—Buck's little note—between her fingers, all the while, and holding her own senses wrapped in it!

Mrs. Tomlinson's first whispered greeting to Lady Shortlands set Eugenia free; and she advised her, in a significant tone, "to make good use of her freedom by going out of doors at once, for an airing," imagining that she would meet Sir Edmund in the hall and that the desired proposal could there be made, without further postponement. For Mrs. Tomlinson had the true spoilt woman's instinct of wishing to see a matter settled, when once she had put her hand to it, even if it were the very thing she had set her face against, an hour before.

Eugenia listlessly put on her shady hat, when Parfitt brought it to her in the corridor,—Parfitt, sleek and vigilant, refreshed by well-earned sleep. She did not much care what was done with her: she had thrown a great stake, what were trivial gains? She went down the grand staircase, neither knowing nor caring that she was meant to meet Sir Edmund at the bottom of it.

Nor did she! for as we know, he had avoided her approach, and was now resting in the quiet of his darkened sitting-room, busy with a thought that was already half a dream.

The hall and corridors seemed all “asleep or dead” to Eugenia, but the “Lubin” that was “away” was not poor Sir Edmund! She was very glad to get out of them, at last, under the fresh smile of the sky that was so familiar to her in its every aspect, and with a certain frank sweet breeze for

company that came fragrant over fields washed by the heavy showers which had fallen in the intervals of tropic heat. Who will wonder that her first steps led her to the little white temple which had become so dear to her, for the beloved's sake? As she approached it, she pressed his letter firmlier between her clasped hands: she half expected to find the place illuminated in some strange way, but when she reached it, she found it emptied of light. True, there was no wet pebble about its sheltered pathway, that, as it cast its afternoon shadow, did not seem to shine in that wonderful glow with which her memory endued the scene. But the temple, where it stood in the cypress alley, shaded from the sun, had a tomb-like aspect. There was no trace of the beloved's presence: the flowers were removed, the door was locked; she had lost even the little breeze, in her descent to the hollow, and the silence was a presage

which was more than she could bear. For, all this while, it had been dawning on Eugenia's understanding that her love might not be what was best—the very best—for Buck. That it had not been what was best for *her*, she never thought; but, as her heart grew heavy at the tokens of his absence and the signs of his forgotten presence, she began dimly to comprehend that there should be a sort of martyrdom before her.

She had obtained a glimpse of his adaptability—though it was only from a window—had perceived that it was pretty much as well for him, in his own estimate, to be with one woman as another, provided that he was made much of;—a view of life so different to Eugenia's, to whom “all men beside” him were “but shadows,” that it negatived and overturned her beliefs, and prevented her being able to predicate of him what he would do. His was a sort of amorous

untruth, which is worse than a deception in words.

Eugenia was far too generous to reproach him for having gone away in that “jocund company:” she thought that it was well for him to be with Anne; she fancied him being fascinated by that brilliant smile and enthralled by that contemptuous touch which, to her own bewildered gaze, had seemed to hold so much in it of appropriative love. It was hard that she should be left alone, when he had “nothing to remember her by,” she thought; she recollects that she had never said even such pleasant things to him as to others, she was conscious that she had never made him laugh, that he could make no comparison of her wit with Anne’s. Ere that drive was over, Anne would have stored his mind with a hundred anecdotes, would have flattered and amused him.

(And so she might have done had she

been with him : but all the while he was "as merry as a grig," in the smart trotting-trap with pretty May, and nothing but a big cigar for *chaperon* !)

Poor Eugenia, she felt how useless was her dowry—consisting of her beauty and her love ! Of the one she made nothing—though, in her presence, it was everything to Buck, and filled his eyes like light ;—and the other seemed likely to be rather a burthen than a joy. Already it had taken all the glory out of her day ! That was because it was no idle fancy, but the love "with such deep roots in earth" as true love must have ; always anxiously desiring the best for the beloved, at whatever sacrifice of self. In this first passion of Eugenia's, she had laid hold not on any fragile blossom of inclination, but on the real and rough-barked tree. It was less like to furnish her with a rose-garland for her wearing, than with a crown of thorns

—but, for all that, it was the “only wear” for her. There is no choice in love.

She walked on, musing, and she turned aside into the trellised walk, which had been stripped of all its lanterns now by the many gardening hands, but which only the season could strip of its verdure, and nothing of the gleam that rested on each leaf for her. Slowly she made her way down it towards the sea.

The walk was sweet with roses; and the wires that crossed it were starred with great clematis blooms, violet and red, that hung in the mid-air, like dragon-flies stayed on the wing. Then there were tendrils of the vine and every sort of creeper making little lovely lines and twirls against the deep blue of the August sky; and under these, right along the path-side, was a close border of the taller lemon-verbena sheltered by hardy geraniums crouching against an old wall somehow con-

nected with the breakwater, low down, to which the path wandered. The atmosphere was full of warm soft scents: the air was so still, and the sky so clear, that it was as if Eugenia had been shut into some enchanted crystal, which contained the earth and sea. She took off her hat and roamed along. A week ago she would have run, singing blithely as she ran for sheer delight: now she was silent; like a girl-queen, she felt the weight of the responsibilities her kingdom brought her. She could "live light in the spring," no more. She was a woman with a woman's burthen of love.

She was fully conscious of all the beauty that was about her. And more than once she stooped to lift a snail out of the path and put him into safe hiding, admiring, as she did so, the prismatic light on his wet shell. The cloud was not upon her eyes but in her heart, and there she felt a tempest

pent which lowered over all this glad and joyful scene. She longed, as she had never longed before, for her mother's arms;—for some soul who would understand this bitter boon that had become her portion, for some lap in which to hide her head and weep.

And then, just as the longing seemed to overmaster her, and her footsteps faltered, she came by some shadowy dew-scented turn in the glade through which the path wandered, to the rough stone ledge of wall, where she had stood with Buck in the midnight; and *beyond* it—Oh! not *about* it any longer—lay the sea.

“The sea,” she thought, “that has so many secrets!” She stood, as in a dream, looking down into its shallowing waves as they were lapsing towards the ebb, as if she would tell them her secret too. They seemed to her, as they had seemed before, in other wise, a symbol of her love, as spending their force

by little, lower and lower down the shore, they "let the dry land appear."

Eugenia stayed for some time on the terrace, gazing out on the blue waters. There she "thought it out," with that daylight ability for reasoning which comes to one, in open air, sometimes, and when the object of the heart's desire is far away. It is easy to see clearly in loneliness and light. There she made up her mind that there were better possibilities in store for Buck than that he should be hers.

Not that it so much as occurred to her that any other man could fill his place with her. There was no man else that existed for Eugenia now. No: she was there for his taking, if he wanted her, and she would do her best for him. But what a little best it was! She must give him to understand that he was not pledged, and that she had no money. Eugenia undervalued her connection with Lady Shortlands and "the Duchess," which meant

so much for a man like Buck. She thought of what he had told her of his people, not to despise them but to form an estimate of their position. But she failed. She had always lived with people whose position was above their fortune, who had great taxes on their possessions, and great pride: she had no comprehension or experience of *bourgeois* comfort, of the luxury that spends more on the dinner of every day than on any property or intellectual pursuit. She was as ignorant of the life of money-spending—of what good old Mr. Jarvis called “the margin”—in Arthur Jarvis’ Clifton home, as he would have been, at Shortlands, of the management of the estate; and she thought that a lieutenant in a marching regiment must needs be poor. She could see that he was not one to make sacrifices: but how could she blame him for that? He was “the god of her idolatry,”—and *Anne’s*. Therefore, if need were, and if he had a better

chance in life—which she felt was before him under her eyes—she must make up her mind to give him up. What *was* it to give up? Only his presence; for her memory would hold his image for ever. But this surrender, all the while she planned it for herself, seemed hardly possible. How could she get her heart out of his keeping? How could she undo what his kiss had done? Ah! if it was to be, the daylight reasoning pleaded, she must leave *how* it was to be, to God!

Again Eugenia lifted her fair face and looked across the sea—all misty now to her dim eyes, and blurred. Again, and in a closer image, the deep blue waters seemed a symbol of her love. Her Arthur's life was like the land, she thought, with its fertility, stability, and strength. There were the uplands and lawns of his days, to be crowned with firs and flowers—and there was the mud and the earthiness too, but she did not think of that!—

over the shores of his life, where they touched on space, her love had lapped like the sea. “There has been a high tide,” she thought, with a smile at the following out of her own fancies, “it must go down again now. But has not the sea done something, at least, for the land, when she withdraws, and leaves the beach so bright, the stones so strong of salt, the sand so smooth and pure?” And Keats’ most musical and lovely lines were in her ears :

*“The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth’s human shores.”*

“Earth’s human shores.” . . . “I must love him,” she thought, “like that ; as the sea loves the land, leaving him free for labour or for harvest,” but now and then returning and never failing in her “priestlike task,” bringing the fresh airs on her bosom and the waters on her tides, for his delight.

So far her fancy helped her, so far she took

heart; but as she watched the fast-receding waves, "The sea withdraws," she thought, "the sea withdraws. She must hide the boons of the land, and its kisses, in her heart—and they are little boons and lazy kisses:—the sea must leave the land, she leaves him—she leaves him,"—her overwrought mind could not endure the strain: she could not bear it calmly. She laid her head upon the old stone wall where she had leaned with her beloved, in that long kiss that had sealed her his, beneath the moon and stars, and wept as if her very heart would break.

In her hour of spiritual pain, she vanquished: but her victory, indeed, was to be more hard to win. It was to bring her to the gates of death.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMANLY.

THERE was to be no further meeting with Buck, for Eugenia, that day. When the picnic party returned, tired with pleasure, it was late in the afternoon, and she was on duty again reading aloud to Lady Shortlands, whom the bleeding—which had given her at first so much relief—seemed to have enfeebled greatly when once the fever of her fit was gone. She lay, like an old woman of any sort, bundled away in a heap, with all the wit and sarcasm drained out of her, her brain dormant, her restless active mind asleep, in an intermittent doze, which only left her when Eugenia's voice stopped now and then, as the long fierce hours

of the summer day burned down to dusk. Dr. Burroughes had no further dread of apoplexy now: but she was very weak, and, with that desperate clinging to the real and true—whether it be of a kind that amuses us in health, or not—which comes upon us at such times of mortal sickness, she could not even lie still without Eugenia watching her. She took a sudden mistrust of Parfitt, who was glad enough to get to sleep again, for she was to watch through the small hours of the night when Lord Shortlands insisted that his “beautiful niece must have her beauty-sleep.”

Not that Eugenia’s splendid health was tired or that she looked wan. Despite the excitement of her companion thoughts, her walk had been refreshing: even that burst of weeping—unlike any in which she had indulged since her father’s death—had made for her relief. The dew of tears had brightened her sweet eyes and flushed the fairness of her

face. She was not sleepy—at least she fancied she was not—her nerves were in a state of irritation and fever with which her shortened night had much to do, but she did not know what this restlessness meant, and was still indignant with herself for being so wakeful and so well. She looked at Lady Shortlands' inert form: “Oh! if I could be dead of sleep, and careless of all but the shading of the light, like you,” she thought; “if I could cast this passion out of me! I wish I could have an illness, and get over it so; but that is not likely to happen to me, I shall have to go on. And if Anne loves him, I must let him go!”

As she watched her aunt, so changed, so drowsy, something possessed her vigorous soul; a strange longing, at first, only, but gathering force to become a strange intent. It was unfortunate that she should have these hours of unbroken leisure in this dark sick-room, wherein to contemplate her own posi-

tion : her mind brooded over it, but with no consideration of self. The one tinge of selfishness that she allowed herself was the desire to suffer bodily pain, to be physically wounded, and not to have to endure all the anguish that might be in store for her, with a sound mind in a sound body. To give him up and go about among the other guests,—that was the one course that she did not dare to face.

Now that she was shut away from Buck, she could regard her love for him as an aberration, a madness. She could not understand it. Had any one told her, a week before, that she would pay an unwilling visit to Ashbank, and there fall head over ears in love with a man—in a suit of *dittos* of the most abominable pattern—younger than herself, stupid, hard-hearted, ill-bred too—as the term is used—she would have been too indignant even for laughter. She would not have comprehended—having no *data* whereby to comprehend—

such a possibility: and yet all this had happened. With chances before her and admiration around her, this beautiful woman discovered, of a sudden, that she was bound to such a man as that, by the rough galling chain of self-sacrificing love—the worse because so purely personal—which was like to prove her slavery and her joy. Eugenia set about considering how best to break her bonds.

“If Anne loves him,” she said again, “I must let him go. But perhaps Anne will not love him.” . . . She had no illusions about Buck’s worth. Had her love been one of illusion, had he appeared to her first as a demigod or a hero—instead of a mere man that satisfied a void in her heart—her gradual discoveries of his real common nature might have helped her out of her trouble. But she had never felt such an illusion. She had seen him, one of three men, looking like them,

dressed like them, with no claims to pretension and yet pretentious, and she had set her heart upon him. As if she had drunk some philtre, or had the juice of “Love-in-idleness” cast into her eyes, this young man had become the husband of her choice. Had they been princess and peasant, given the chances, the result would have been much the same. It was just “the heart’s desire” that is so common, so sure, so sweet; that the women of old time died for, and the women of to-day deny. We do not think it strange to hear a Greek heroine complain of being stricken to the death by Love’s arrows and their wounding; of just so vital a wound, and just so tragically, was Eugenia smitten; but the Greek heroine would have “recognised the god”—would have bewailed herself and succumbed;—while Eugenia, with the modern instinct of science, determined that she would cauterise the wound instead, though the means

should make Love's arrows glance aside from her for ever afterwards. . . .

But Eugenia did not underrate the potency and selfishness of Buck's passion. If she had to quench it, she must find some way that would turn his love to coldness. All the while that she "thought upon her fate," *Lady Shortlands lay sleeping, drained of life and its pulses.* She was as good as dead, it seemed to Eugenia: she was indifferent to all: she would hardly have opened her eyes for a flash of lightning or have turned upon her side for an earthquake. She wished no longer to be read aloud to, and the books, of such hap-hazard choosing, lay unheeded by her pillows. They were not such as Eugenia cared to read herself, nor—had she cared ever so much—would she have read them, after her promise to Sir Edmund. . . .

Sir Edmund? He had been thinking of her; for presently Lord Shortlands brought

to her, at his request, the prettily bound volume of James Chatteris' poems which Mrs. Tomlinson had mislaid. Lord Shortlands had been much interested by the discovery of Chatteris' cousinship to his wife's niece ; and the young man's work—as is often the case now-a-days—derived its value to his reader, from the accident of his birth.

Eugenia, we know, had seen the little book before. Vane had sent it to her, and it was in her room at Shortlands Farm : had it been new to her she might not have troubled to read it, but now she turned its pages slowly, cutting them here and there, for there was a sharp Spanish knife of Sir Edmund's between the leaves. The book had mostly to do with love, and, as Eugenia was an expert now, she was curious to recall how the fierce passion showed itself to Chatteris' young and untried heart. The poems were poor enough : the sentiment of the lines was warm, but the brain

that had engendered them was not on fire. The words were not beaten out like sparks from an anvil, they were strung together like shining beads, with a due regard for commas and colons. The young poet, like most young poets, said more than he knew. Had he felt but the half of what he claimed to be feeling, his heart-beats must have stopped his pen: but as it was, it travelled glibly over "desires" and "fires"—"eternal sorrows" and "barren morrows"—with as little tremor in its guidance, as when it wrote of "roses"—and of course there was a very great deal, in the little book, about "roses!" To Eugenia, none of the words she read seemed to signify their own meanings, in the context where they were. She turned on to the latter pages of the volume, and there she chanced upon some imitations—of all kinds of things, French "*rondels*," "*triolets*" and "*vilanelles*," old Scotch and English ballads and so forth—

which before, loving greatly the real things, she had voted too tiresome to read. But now she found the puzzle of attending to them suit her mood, and, at the end, one of the ballad imitations caught her notice, and when she read it, seemed to have more living force in it than the rest. This was partly, perhaps, because of her own sympathy with its contents, and partly, certainly, because it was an echo of some stronger and more manly voice, though weak and vague itself. With our funny modern mixing of the “rococo” and the “severely simple,” it was headed: “An Antick Ballad of Constancie. For a Scotch song.” There was a great deal of it—verse after verse—but these lines Eugenia read to herself half-aloud, and they are a sufficient sample of its worth :

“ *Gin ye ty’d a napkin roun’ my een*
 To blind me fra’ the day,
 I’d greet till I wash’d your napkin clean
 But I’d no pu’ it awa’. ”

*Gin ye boun' my hands with gyvès tight
 For ivery mon to scoff,
 My sighs shauld sheen their siller bright
 But I'd na' pluck them off.*

*Gin ye strake your dagger into me,
 —And that for nae mon's guid—
 I'd dee, an' ye wad hae me dee,
 But I'd drip nae drap o' bluid.*

*Nae drap o' bluid fra' me shauld part
 To tell ye'd murthered me,
 But I'd hide your dagger in my hairt,
 As I turned me roun' to dee.*

*There's nae weird thing that ye mote do,
 Nae dour thing, I'd confess ;
 For there's naething could be done o' you
 Wad mak' me loe you less.*

*An' it's faud your hands the while ye live,
 Wat's left for warking for ?
 There's nae guid gift that God could give
 Wad mak' me loe you more.*

*Bekass to me, ye are all above,
 Like the sky is above the sea ;
 Bekass ye are my ain true love,
 And I doe warship thee !”*

When Eugenia had read the last two lines, she let the book fall on her lap and clasped her

hands upon it, the hot tears quickening in her eyes, as she repeated, with an unconscious dwelling upon the tenderer pronoun into which the young poet had lapsed,

*“Bekass ye are my ain true love,
And I doe warship thee.” . . .*

She read no more; blind to the page before her, she let her sight follow the makings of her thought: if James Chatteris had made no other verses, he would nevertheless not have written, and not have pestered his publisher in vain.

Still Lady Shortlands lay sleeping, drained of life and its pulses.

She did not even hear Eugenia's murmuring, she did not even rouse herself to call the little song "great rubbish," as no doubt she would have done had her veins not run with so quiet and calm a tide. It was a very enviable state, Eugenia thought. . . .

Presently Dr. Burroughes came in, and took

his patient's temperature. There was no fever, the "springs of her being" were low : it was only nourishment she wanted now, and nourishment of all sorts abounded in the Ashbank larders. When he had satisfied himself about Lady Shortlands' case—if the perception of her increasing weakness could be called satisfaction—he let his looks rest upon Eugenia's beauty. The excitement within her had prevented the long hours of captivity, in this darkened room, from telling upon her ; she had none of that leaden languor which bespeaks a vigil. Her face was radiantly lovely in the softened light, almost as if there were a lamp behind it ; and her eyes shone like stars. He could not resist drawing her aside into the sitting-room, ostensibly to speak to her without disturbing his patient, really to see her better.

When he had given her some directions about keeping up Lady Shortlands' strength, she detained him, rather to his surprise ; still

with the air of one who has something further of importance to ask. She stood before him in the doorway, drawing the sharp Spanish knife through her fingers.

“This bleeding has much weakened my aunt?” she began, in a tentative tone; but Dr. Burroughes could not feel that she was anxious, it was rather as if she wished for an affirmation that she spoke,—not to be contradicted.

“Oh yes!” he said lightly; “to say the truth, she has felt it more than I had hoped she would, but the great thing was to get rid of that congestion; with a woman of her quick temperament it is the fever we have most to fear. Her constitution is so strong that I have every confidence she will recover from this weakness soon; and in the meantime it will do her worlds of good,—*worlds of good*, believe me!”

Eugenia still looked at him, with those questioning, starlike eyes, her face aflame. He

reassured her with a touch of humour in his answer.

“She will be all the nicer for it too,” he said, smiling: “there is a deal of satire and passion in full-bloodedness; and she will come back to life just twice as kind and gentle.”

“That *is* so, is it?” said Eugenia dreamily. She did not seem amused, any more than she had seemed anxious. He was at a loss how to reply to her thoughts, but he went on cheerily:

“Of course it ‘is so.’ Why, if *you* were in a fit or fury of any sort, and I were to bleed you, you would sleep like a top, and come to yourself again as mild as a lamb.”

“That *is* so, is it?” said Eugenia once more: she did not smile, although she bent her head, and Dr. Burroughes began to fear that she resented his homely illustrations and thought his manner familiar; but no! “Thank you,” she said quite gravely. She did not stir.

“I will take another look at her,” he said, to break the silence—and passed into the sick-room again.

It was drawing towards evening now; and the light was full on those south-western windows; it fell upon Eugenia’s graceful figure, as she stood upright in her soft grey dress, with her hands clasped over the paper-knife. She was just going to follow Dr. Burroughes, when there came a light step at the door, and Anne Jefferies entered, with a noiseless rustle like a hush, and with her finger on her lips.

“I thought I would come in this way,” she said, “I am privileged, you know; and I wanted to inquire for her before I even took off my wraps.”

Anne was looking almost pretty, as Eugenia noticed with a pang. Her dress was always perfect, and her looks were not of the sort that suffer from a day without a mirror. She did not “*disarrange*,” as prettier women sometimes

do. Her face was bright and cool, and her hair neat; while a priceless oriental shawl, of some rare fabric, twisted round her shoulders, became her trim figure well.

“You would have enjoyed the drive, you beautiful Atalanta!” she said softly. Her brisk voice was pleasant to hear, retaining, even while lowered almost to a whisper, the same *timbre* that her singing had.

“What have you done to your hand?” said Eugenia: she felt she could not speak affectionately to Anne,—not so much for anything that Anne had done, as for all that Anne was.

“Sprained it;” said Anne with a little laugh that proved the sprain to be but trifling, and she exhibited the wrist of her left hand, bound firmly up in a stiff cotton tie—“No, Dr. Burroughes” (as he re-entered the room), “*not* another case for you! I will confess here ‘*in camerâ*’—‘*in camerâ obscurâ*,’ I may say.”

She laughed again, as she pronounced her

Latin in a delicate Italian way: her laugh was as soft as her speech, it seemed to make a slight warmth about her in the gathering dusk, without startling the silence. "See here," she said, untwisting the tie, "I have spoiled the Egyptians, as my ancestors did before me!"

Her fingers were nimble enough, despite the sprain she boasted.

"Why this is a man's morning-cravat!" said Dr. Burroughes, "one of those new-fashioned, spotted ones which I always envy my sex the courage of wearing. Have you hung a fresh victim to your wrist, 'taking him by the throat,' on the analogy of scalping?"

"Don't be so pert!" said Anne with a movement of her bird-like head, that might, or might not, have concealed a blush, but in this case did not, although Eugenia, standing in the shadow, thought it did. "I am going to tell you all about it," she added coming up to

“Atalanta” confidentially: “our gallant officers’ stiff bows teased me—and teased them too, though they were too proud to own it. Whenever they shifted their position, up went their hands to their throats:”—as she spoke she made a little movement that recalled *one* man’s gesture forcibly to Eugenia.—“This particular blue and white one was specially obnoxious to me, under a certain square chin that you wot of, tying-on a certain curly chestnut head, above a certain very patterny suit. Well, as I was getting down from the buggy, I twisted my wrist a little—not *fatally*, you know,—indeed my joints are remarkably supple—but ‘here’s my opportunity!’ I thought. It was Mr. Jones’ fault that I was sprained, and Mr. Jones’ tie would I have!—I think I must *like* Mr. Jones very much, or perhaps his tie was the most aggressive. He tried a compromise: ‘Wouldn’t his handkerchief do?’ ‘No: it was too soft and reeked of musk or

chypre! Mr. Jones—poor dear—didn't like that hit about the *chypre*; the rest of them began to chaff him, and he thought he had better not refuse me further: ultimately he gave in, and bound up my finger with his cravat, in the sweetest way imaginable. I shall take that young gentleman in hand—if he won't wear blue cravats; he looks so nice without them!—and I assure you his self-sacrifice has won my heart."

Eugenia did not speak: she saw the scene, and the vision seemed to stifle her. Anne pitied her a little, but had no compunction for her folly: she included her involuntary sigh in her own narrative: "Well," she said, "Mr. Jones has got his reward: for his bereft shamefacedness appealed to me, and he has been so very nice—*too* nice, he was:—and borne being laughed at so very nicely—*too* nicely;—so May and I tore the border off my pretty pocket-handkerchief—just come from

the Rue de la Paix—and made him a fresh cravat. It is quite *chic* I assure you: oriental, like my shawl, worked in gold threads and silk: he is peacocking about in it, this moment, marked for the day with my initials which we arranged for the centre of the bow: we managed it so cleverly.—But look," she ended, producing from her pocket the fine cambric centre of a cobweb handkerchief, from which the monogram and wide bright border had been recklessly torn, "you see I am the loser, for this scrap of stuff will never mend my finery!"

She unwound the blue and white tie from her wrist, while she was speaking, and flung it carelessly upon the table,—just a mere strip of spotted cotton, folded to the breadth of an inch and a half. It had served its turn—and more!

Dr. Burroughes was amused at Anne's recital, but Eugenia could not speak; she looked

at the common thing, wisped up, on the table, and it seemed to turn into a serpent to sting her to the heart. Her ready fancy pictured all the drama. There was Anne before her, —telling her the details with her sweet incisive voice—there was the turquoise blue of Buck's tie for sign of what had happened.

"Turquoise," Eugenia thought to herself, remembering the meanings of precious stones, "'Turquoise—Success in life!' Oh yes! God grant it him . . . God grant it him!" She could not have spoken without tears, and she was too proud to show her pain.

"You are tired," said Anne gently: she had not meant to wound, but only to prevent: "pray let me watch by Lady Shortlands' side a bit, and you dine down: I'll do without my dear Mr. Jones for two whole hours, if you like."

Then Eugenia rallied: she would not be tempted; she would keep away from her dar-

ling ; she would let him have this chance in life, if he cared for it—and who would not ?

“ No, thank you, dear,” she answered with a quiet tenderness in her tone, unusual for her, “ this is the place for me.” For one instant she longed to open her heart to Anne ; but she could not find words, in Dr. Burroughes’ presence : and just then Anne and he went into the sick-room together, to steal a glance at Lady Shortlands where she lay sleeping in her drowsy calm.

Eugenia did not go with them : she still stood at the table, on which Anne had thrown down Buck’s little turquoise tie : she did not move her attitude, but, as they left the room, her fingers fiercely caught the senseless cotton strip, and twined it and twirled it, as if she were in mortal pain. She felt indeed an agony within herself, as if her heart had turned over in her body. Then, with the fingers of both hands still twisted in the

ends, she laid the smooth cool band across her lips and eyes, straightening it out so. The thing seemed, all at once, to have become so dear to her, that she prayed an incoherent prayer that Anne might forget it, might never come back, only might leave her always this that he had worn.

The paroxysm passed; her hands had changed from fire to ice, but it seemed as if her brain would burst unless she wept. Then she unwound the scarf from her fingers and laid it gently back upon the table, ruthlessly pressing down her burning tears as Anne came back.

—“Is it a bee?” said that young lady, “or is it a wasp—I am not *entomological*—which survives the loss of its sting? I am sorry if the comparison should sound uncivil, but I really fear it is a wasp to which I must liken your poor aunt. Yes; it is the wasp that grows another sting—so I’ve been told—

and we must hope that *she* will too. For I shan't love her half as well till she gets back the use of her tongue, which is, I suppose, as near the sting of a wasp as . . . I won't say more. If you really won't let me stay, Miss Brand—only you must let me say 'Eugenia' whether I stay or not—I must hurry away to dress for dinner. It is long past the half hour."

Eugenia hoped that she would not notice the little cotton tie; but Anne was not one to do things by halves, she meant to show Miss Brand what an easy conquest her lieutenant was. "Oh, my trophy!" she exclaimed, and she gathered it up with her gloves and her parasol: "Celestine, my maid, is very superstitious; I shall tell her that the spirits of the glen, where we picnic'd, have been conjuring with my handkerchief."

When she was gone, Eugenia took up once more the Spanish paper-knife she had been

holding, and passed it slowly through her fingers with her former gesture.

“What is that you are playing with ?” asked Dr. Burroughes, rather with a view to looking at her exquisite hands and admiring the grace of their movement, than with any real interest in the knife. Then Eugenia looked at it too, for the first time.

It was not, properly speaking, a paper-cutter; but a pointed knife, with a quaint handle of horn and pearl, like the daggers which Spanish or Italian peasants sometimes wear. It had not the Ashbank stamp of value upon it. Sir Edmund had picked it up in some village, on his travels, and left it in the volume of poems. Eugenia had taken it unconsciously, to cut the leaves; she had not observed its fashion.

“That is a dangerous toy,” said Dr. Burroughes, “it might do you a mischief.”

“Would it cut me ?” said Eugenia absently.

“I don’t know about *cutting*,” he answered with professional accuracy, “but its point is as sharp as a needle. It might give you a nasty wound.”

Then he followed the rest, to dress for dinner; and Eugenia, being left alone, slid the knife into the pocket of her grey gown. Then she returned to watch her aunt.

Still Lady Shortlands lay sleeping, drained of life and its pulses.

The next hour was a very long one for Eugenia. She could detect the indications of the dinner-hour, by the opening and shutting of doors and the *frou-frou* of dresses—for no gongs or bells were sounded to-day. Presently there followed the ring of high light voices against deep ones, as the couples crossed the hall; afterwards silence, when the great doors of the dining-room were folded-to. Then Parfitt came to her, to tell her that her dinner was prepared in Lady

Shortlands' sitting-room, and that Miss Buxton had been asking leave to share it with her.

Now Eugenia, as we know, had no idea that whatever jealousy she need feel, should be born of May's young charm. Her thought was all of Anne—Anne whom Buck might learn to love, whom it would be good for him to marry ; and to whom—if she had known the truth—he had scarcely spoken all the afternoon, except during that short scene of the cotton tie, after he had hurt her wrist in helping her down from Crossley's trap ! Whether May Buxton were with him or not, which really mattered for his peace of mind, did not seem to Eugenia to matter in the least ; and she would not have been pained at all, by knowing that May's place was next to him at dinner. She sent a message with her love, in reply, that she would sooner dine alone ; adding to Parfitt that she would have some soup and chicken brought to her

in the bedroom where she was, for she had no appetite.

She ate her little meal alone, by her aunt's bedside, and just when she had finished it Parfitt returned and told her, in a rather sour tone, that "one of the under-housemaids wished to speak a word to her."

Somewhat surprised, she rose and went into the corridor where stood a pretty young girl, trembling from head to foot, and crimson with excitement—just one of those lovely village maidens that strike one in their own sphere as possessed of delicate beauty, but that look coarse and hard when transplanted from their fit surroundings. She was like a sturdy, red japonica-blossom, against Eugenia's lily beauty. The girl and Eugenia were, alike, singularly impressed by each other's appearance: the one with a quick instinct of reverence, akin to awe; the other with a pang of envy that was nearly dread. Eugenia guessed at once

whose roving eyes had lighted on this radiant face. She gazed almost with anger at the ripe lips—so sweet and red: she felt, she knew not how, that the kisses she loved were upon them.

“Oh — please — miss,” — said the little housemaid, “it’s a note! I swore I’d give it you myself, upon your tray, and I got the tray from the footman; but Mrs. Starfish” —(probably a garbled version of Parfitt’s patronymic)—“she took it from me into the bedroom, and I caught it away—the note, miss—for I didn’t know what to do—and here it is;” (taking a crumpled letter from the bosom of her print dress), “and please, miss, I’ve told Mrs. Starfish it was about your room that I wanted to speak,—not that she believes it, miss; I saw it in her eye! and I never could tell a lie right, though I promised the gentleman I’d tell a hundred if I need.”

“Give me the note,” said Eugenia, “you

need not be untruthful to any one." She felt a sort of happy pride in owning that Buck was hers. But was it well to own it?

"Oh! but Mr. Buck"—

"‘Mr.’—who?"

"*Mr. Buck*, miss, my lady, I mean," stammered the girl confused, for she knew the gallant officer only by his pet-name, "Mr. Buck said I wasn't to let it out to any one, 'upon my soul' my lady: but just to say to you, my lady, 'that Mr. Buck had sent you the letter' . . . or else . . ." and then she became so confused, that, in simple pity for her case, Eugenia let her hasten away down a back stairway. After all it must be as Buck wished. If she were to give him up to Anne, it would be better that nothing had been known of their love.

"Thank you; there need be no change in my room," she said to Parfitt, with white lips, as she got back to the door: and even

Parfitt was satisfied. Miss Brand had never told a lie.

Eugenia came and sat down again at her aunt's bedside.

Still Lady Shortlands lay sleeping, drained of life and its pulses.

For some seconds, Eugenia was astonished at the mastery her feelings had gained over her senses. This rush of blood : was it anger, was it shame? she did not know ; but the beating of her heart seemed to suffocate her, and her hands shook. She remembered, as one often remembers a trivial circumstance at a crisis of feeling, how she had been to some French play in London with her aunt, during the season, and how the heroine had exclaimed : “*Ah! j'étoffe!*” at any climax of indignation or love. It had seemed to her an absurd exclamation then, as she sat listening, while her heart beat evenly under a fire of admiring opera-glasses. Now she understood what the

mimic sufferer had expressed, taught by this coursing through her veins which made breathing a labour, and strangled her.

“What a wretch I am,” she thought to herself, “what a brute!”

Then she tore the letter open, and she read as follows:—

“DEAR JINNY,—I’ll thank you not to send ‘me messages by that d——d hound Trefusis. ‘I never go shares with any chap, mind that! ‘We’ve had a very jolly day, and I’ve enjoyed ‘myself very much. Miss Jefferies was very ‘civil: she’s a sportswoman. It seems to me ‘that you hanker after that fellow, and let ‘him dangle after you more than you need. ‘Now look here! you can take your choice.

‘If you can come out for a stroll to-night, put ‘a light in your window at eleven, and *I’m your man!*” (The last words were underlined, and meant to be as tender as he had thought the

previous ones would be imperative.)—"But, if 'you can't, be down to breakfast at nine *sharp* 'to-morrow, that I may have a sight of you 'before I go. Leave up. Seems a deuce of 'a while since last night. Don't forget. Yours 'till death,

A. J. J."

She read it through, with parted lips: all the while she knew that she was like some thirsty creature, gasping at a mirage in the desert. There was not a word of real affection in the letter. "He would be just as happy with Anne Jefferies as with me," she thought: even that little sentence, "yours till death" was carelessly scribbled, as if it were—as indeed it was—a very customary signature.

"No: I am nothing to him that another woman could not be—that one of those servants could not be," she said out loud, as she crushed the rustling letter in her trembling

hands. Then she looked up, drawn as if by a magnet, and met Lady Shortlands' opened eyes.

Lady Shortlands was wide awake, and, with one hand beneath her wrinkled face, was regarding her niece intently, with the strangely limpid glance of a sick person after heavy sleep. Her eyes, which had been filmed a moment before, were shining now like precious stones. She seemed to be reading Eugenia's whole soul, and in truth, the girl's attitude expressed her mental struggle. For, quite unconscious of her aunt's awakening, she had been sitting with her face towards her, that her back might be turned to Parfitt if she should re-enter the room. Her chair was drawn almost within the bed-curtains, and, though her eyelids had been drooped, her beautiful features and her clasped hands were full of supplication and impassioned sorrow. She had, as it were, taken refuge in Lady

Shortlands' nullity, than which, as it happened, nothing could have been more vigilant.

For Lady Shortlands had been looking at her niece for some moments, before her gaze attracted Eugenia's eyes to hers; and she had seen quite well that something was amiss, although she could not perceive the letter, which was in Eugenia's lap, on a lower level than the bedclothes, and which—with a deception new to her—Eugenia managed to crumple up into the palm of her soft hand. Then she roused herself to speak.

“You are awake, Aunt Agatha?” she said, forcing a smile, “how you have slept! and you are better now?”

“I am well,” said the old lady slowly: “the fever has left me: I am quite well.” She spoke deliberately, as if she mastered her words with trouble, but she did master them, and seemed disposed to say more: “I want you to make me a promise, Eugenia;” she said.

“What is it?” said Eugenia: she had caught her aunt’s tone, and spoke slowly too.

—“A true Carruthers!” murmured Lady Shortlands, with a chuckle, “so like me at your age, that answer—so like me now! I think you *are* like me, Eugenia.”

Eugenia did not hazard a guess: she did not know into what likeness the world might not change her, if it should deal as hardly with her always as it had dealt to-day.

“What is it?” she said again. She knew precisely what her aunt’s exaction would be: but she felt that the sooner it was put into shape, the better: whether she refused it or no. The night before, she would have refused it point-blank: now she was not so certain but that it might be best for him she loved if she complied.

But she was not prepared for Lady Shortlands’ circumlocution. “I want you,” she said,

“to make me no promises in event of my living—because I don’t want to see you break them! If I live, and I assure you I have every intention of doing so, I can take you for another campaign in a better house than this, where I should not have a fit—this illness is just wholly due to *mauvais ton*. It is only in event of my death that I want you to promise me that you will marry Sir Edmund Trefusis.”

“You are not going to die,” said Eugenia stupidly: “you are going to get well.”

“I *know* I am going to get well,” said Lady Shortlands impatiently, plucking at the rich silk counterpane, “don’t irritate me so! I shall get well soon, if you don’t thwart me or bring in any more lobsters to supper without salad: but I must have your promise or I shall not sleep. Just in case I don’t get better, let me feel that you are well provided for, and will really snub your grandfather.”

“But you don’t feel that you will die, do you?” said Eugenia innocently.

“‘Die!’” cried Lady Shortlands, the tears starting to her eyes, “You unfeeling minx, how dare you use such words to me! Didn’t I tell you I was going home to-morrow? Now for that unkindness, Eugenia, you *must* promise me: you don’t know how you hurt people’s feelings, talking like that: I really cannot have you hurt Sir Edmund’s.”

“Sir Edmund has not asked me,” said Eugenia—weakly, for she knew that it was not his fault he had not done so long ago. She expected anger, but Lady Shortlands did not seem angry; she smiled persuasively:

“I know;” she said, “and very likely he won’t; but this is just an old woman’s fancy, which you must gratify. Limit it as much as you like. Say if I . . . ‘die,’ as you call it (it’s a horrid word)—if I ‘don’t get better,’ before I can be moved; and if he should wish it, and

ask you, a *year* afterwards—there: will that do? Promise me,” she added with a livid change stealing over her face, which was horrible to see; “promise me, Eugenia, or I swear I shall have another fit. Oh! don’t tell me you” . . .

“I promise *that!*” said Eugenia quickly—after all what did the disposal of her life matter? and this was so unlikely! She would have promised to be queen of England, to reside in the moon, anything—rather than have again the dreadful consciousness that she had brought her aunt, as Parfitt had said, to the very gates of death.

“That will do:” said Lady Shortlands, in a firmer, clearer tone—rather as if she had herself been satisfying some whim of Eugenia’s—(“she would never have promised me even so much,” she thought to herself, “had there been any real understanding between her and Jones”).—“That will do! it was only a fad of

mine to test you. You are a good girl, Eugenia, and a very fair nurse: I shall get well under your care: you are not like those silly chits—Anne Jefferies, for instance, *with her ridiculous fancy for Jones!* Send me Parfitt at once," she added quickly, as one that would not trust herself to say more, "I want her to arrange my pillows."

Glad to escape and think over what she had done, but most to ponder that last utterance of her aunt's, which pierced her like a sword, Eugenia walked into the dressing-room, and bade Parfitt go to her ladyship at once; while she betook herself to her own room, with Buck's letter still in her hand.

"Milady is better, Parfitt," she said; but when Parfitt went into the sick-room, she did not find her so. Lady Shortlands was lying back upon her pillow, panting, with an odd rattle in her throat; entirely exhausted by the effort she had made.

—“Brandy! — beef-tea!” — she said, in a hoarse voice, “give it me quick, or I shall die!” She drank eagerly, but after a few teaspoonfuls, she paused, “Do I look an object?” she asked.

“You don’t look right,” said the tirewoman coldly, tugging at her head-gear. There was not much question of civility between mistress and maid, when they were alone together, after so many years of mutual dependence.

“Make me look right,” said Lady Shortlands drowsily: “you can do it just as well, while I’m asleep.” And suddenly she closed her eyes and slept.

Parfitt shook her head gravely; but she fastened the door and lit two candles; one of these she placed on a little table, by the bedside, the other she held in her hand. When she had unlocked a dressing-box, and taken out her materials, she deliberately climbed up on to the bed, perching herself thereon, in a goblin way which would have been

grotesque, had it been less distressing. So perched, she slowly painted Lady Shortlands face into the hues of health it should have worn.

Could Eugenia have seen her at her dreadful task, she might have fancied she beheld some ghoul at work upon a corpse ; but there was nothing strange to Parfitt in her toil : she prided herself, not a little, on her skill. She rubbed the red upon the flaccid lips, she softened down the *rouge* on the drawn cheeks, she drew the arch of the once beautiful eyebrows amid the wrinkles, she whitened over the furrowed forehead and the creased neck and chin, and finally arranged the false hair under the lace nightcap, with a deftness and precision that was almost automatic. Then she jumped lightly off the bed, put up her paint-box, and adjusted the wax-lights like a woman of a perfectly clear conscience. She did not need to criticise her work. She had done it, or some-

thing like it, morning and evening now, for over twenty years; and never yet, perhaps, under such favourable circumstances of position and repose.

When the *toilette* was over, and Lady Shortlands was ready for her husband's visit, she began to be more wakeful again. Perhaps the reflection of her renewed image in the hand-glass which Parfitt brought her, made her feel as well as she looked, and certainly she looked very handsome. She expressed a wish to see Anne Jefferies, as well as Dr. Burroughes; and after inquiring of her tirewoman the time, and learning that it was nearly ten o'clock, she sent her to Eugenia's room, with the message that she was "to go at once to bed and get a good night's rest before her journey back, next day, to Shortlands."

No words can express the sense of relief this message brought to Eugenia; it set her absolutely free for the whole night, for no one

would disturb her earned repose. But there was a danger in this freedom of which Lady Shortlands little knew. Eugenia had no power to sleep at will : she was the prey to a passion of longing and mistrust, her nerves were over-strung and she was wholly cast upon her own resources, while crumpled in her hand lay the beloved's invitation into the shadowy garden. . . .

When Parfitt was gone, she locked the door of her chamber, and drew across it the heavy tapestry *portière*, which matched the hangings and made the doorway only like a panel of the room. There was a warrior wrought upon it, with his shield and spear, who now stood over her for sentinel. Next she put out the light and opened her square window wide, letting in the calm of the night. And then she drew the sloping chair up to the window, and sat down to wait. She leaned her lovely head against the silken curtains,

till her lips almost touched the climbing rose outside, and the tendrils of the ivy twisted with the tendrils of her hair. The stars were up and the moon, and yet the night was dark,—the trees and creepers made a rustling shadow round the house,—but as Eugenia's eyes got used to it, the lawns defined themselves, and the paths glimmered out. The whole scene, its colours faded, looked like a clear etching as it lay before her. She loosened her grey dress at the throat, and sank deeper into the luxurious cushions; only the moon could gaze upon her beauty, she was out of reach of lover's eyes. There blew in a breath towards her from the open window, that was laden with the scent of flowers and the strong sweet freshness of the sea: but it brought her no balm. Her soul was sick with longing, her strength so spell-bound she could scarcely lift her hand. Her mind was full of vague,

voluptuous images, but one resolve was master over them all. Into that moonlight, where, by and by, those beloved arms would await her—so easily within reach, so fervently desired—she would not go forth. She would pursue this love no further; she would let her lover go. “If he *does* care,” she thought, “it will be all the same by and by.” So far as she was concerned, time had nothing to do with it. It was for ever. But what this decision cost her, there are few can realise. She had given Buck all her heart. “And I do worship thee,” she said to herself over and over, beneath her breath, as Chatteris’ little song still lingered in her memory. Now she must take this gift away; it was not a good gift to give; it was a burthen. The shame of the thing made her cower in her dark corner, but she did not relent. She felt, with a pain to which mere physical suffering were keen delight, that she and her young

lover were not for each other. She had felt it, had she only known, at the very moment of his embrace. There had been some recognition of it, as well as yearning pity over him, in her “Poor love!” and she had “thought it out” during the day, everything helping her to this necessitous conclusion. “Anne’s fancy for Jones”—that shaft of Lady Shortlands’ had struck her, last and deepest. Was it then so patent to all the world? Anne loved him.

The only power that could have stayed Eugenia’s sacrifice of herself, would have been the conviction that she would give her darling irremediable pain. But this “flattering unction” she could not “lay to her soul.” There was a tone in this second letter of his, that proved him ready to renounce her, if she did not care; a tone that told her, somehow—she knew not by what subtle touch—that he would soon forget. But of another life for herself, she never thought:

her promise to Lady Shortlands had faded utterly out of her mind. From herself and her beloved the whole fabric of the world seemed to shrink away, leaving them together—not for ecstasy's sake, but for farewell's.

"We must go our different ways," she said to herself, "it is impossible. He can do better."

Her course of action was resolved on soon, and proved that she had no intention of sparing herself pain. She would remain at her window. It was wide open and he would never guess that she was there, in the darkness; he might, or might not, fancy that she was with her aunt, he would only know that she could not, or she would not, come.

And if he should go out on to the lawn before her, she would see him once more, and be quite sure—for that one time—that it was of her he was thinking.

But how dare cease to love him? How

drain from her veins this new fierce poison that was saturated into the channels of her life? These were conclusions she could not so easily attain. She had a fixed impression that she must suffer something terrible,—“cut off her right hand” or “pluck out her eyes;”—for how is one to die if one be not killed? Nothing can kill one but death. Her life had closed round his; now, for his sake—that Anne might love him—she must tear herself adrift, before he learned the depth of her devotion.

As she thought of the isolation that she planned, she turned cold and shivered in the darkness; an awful sense of suffering and loneliness oppressed her. She got out Buck’s smoking-jacket, and wrapped it round her—its tints blending curiously with the silken fringes of the curtains. Then she sat down again and listened, as the longed-for hour drew near. The clouds travelled fast, the

moon travelled slowly — “His love,” she thought, “and mine!” — how bare and desolate the pale moon looked, as the gauzy veils shimmered away. Still the night wore on; it was hard upon eleven o’clock.

For some time she had heard a confused murmuring downstairs; and now the window of the smoking-room beneath was opened—roughly, not with care as one should open it who came forth secretly—and she could detect the fumes of cigar-smoke wafted up on the sweet cool air.

“What a night!” said someone, with a sigh, stepping out upon the grass and thence on to the gleaming gravel round the lawn. It was not Buck, it was Vane; but other footfalls came crunching the path after his; the last footfall was heavier than the rest, and a soft rich whistle accompanied it. Eugenia drew closer within the friendly shade of her curtains, and hiding her head in the dewy

leaves, peered through the creepers, down. The moment was come: she knew that her beloved was beneath her window.

"Why can't you whistle in tune?" said Crossley.

"Damn tune!" Buck answered savagely; he had glanced up already at Eugenia's darkened casement, and it had not bettered his mood.

"Oh! you Goth!" said Vane impatiently. "Jem Chatteris ought to be here. He's the only chap of us all that can understand a night like this. It's a pity the lad don't smoke."

Buck walked forward a few paces, on to the wet lawn: he did not like reproof, even of his whistling. He looked very big and very strong, Eugenia thought, as she made out his dark figure moulded in the lines of his dress suit. She wondered what he was thinking of, as he stood there, with his hands in his pockets, and puffed away at his cheroot.

Thinking of her, without doubt: for he pulled out his watch; which reassured him, for it showed that the clocks had not yet struck eleven. He was standing with his back to Eugenia, but she could see that he was putting the watch back slowly into his waistcoat-pocket: she could follow the curve of his arm, could mark his broad square shoulders and the slight ruffle of his curly hair, as the wind kissed it. She thought that there must be some beautiful vision in his soul, that he must be learning the lesson of the night, while she leaned out further and further into the roses and the dew.

“What mean devils this moon makes us feel!” said Vane, selecting Crossley for his confidant. His words echoed the very sense that Eugenia’s fancy was putting into poor Buck’s vacantest imaginings: “Upon my life,” he went on, “a night like this makes one half-inclined never to go back to London—

to become a hermit, or at any rate a different sort of fellow altogether."

Eugenia began to repent herself of mistrusting Mr. Henry Vane. Dick Crossley too was sympathetic, and answered something in a lower tone, which Eugenia felt she would have liked, had she heard it: it sounded as if it were half humorous and half reverent, like a boy's prayer. She hoped that Buck had heard it,—for how was she to know that the lower tone was only used that the remark might escape his comment? But Buck's ears were on the alert for other sounds, and he *did* hear Crossley's speech.

"Damned rot!" he said, coarsely, wheeling round and striking his heel into the daisies. Then he stretched himself, with a loud yawn, and sang out, with sound lungs but tunelessly: "A starry night for a ramble!" after which, he too proceeded to take the adaptable Crossley into his confidence. "I say," he said, in a

very knowing voice, “there’s a little girl here, Dick—she’s about ninth housemaid, I should think, by the lot of ‘em—who’s as neat as” . . .

Eugenia bowed her head among the roses, partly, no doubt, from a double instinct of self-preservation—to prevent herself hearing him, and to prevent his seeing her—but more, from a petulant shame on his behalf, which wrung her heart, but for which she soon reproached herself again.—“What right had she,” she reasoned, “to expect him to be other than he was? If one chose to set one’s faith upon a star, who was to blame because it only twinkled, and let fall no moon-rays?” She was indignant at her own passion. Hitherto, indeed, she had scarcely sounded its depths or guessed how it reacted on her nerves: now, as she bent her head upon her arms, she felt something cold and wet between her lips.

She touched it with her hand: it was a sprig of ivy, drenched with dew, which, in the anguish

that her love and his inadequacy had caused her, as she listened, her white teeth had closed upon, and bitten from its stem. The taste of it was sharp and acrid in her mouth already.

It was the first sign that made Eugenia conscious of the physical strain with which her passion mastered her. She held her breath with fear. *Not* to cry out like some wild creature, *not* to leap down into the garden—the denying herself actions which she could never have imagined she would feel the force to do—took all her self-possession for a time. To see her lover thus, among his fellows, to watch the careless and hap-hazard way in which his days and nights were passed, made Eugenia long to interfere—to snatch him away, as one might dream a guardian angel would long sometimes, beyond restraint, to snatch a soul away, out of the whirl and web of this benumbing and ensnaring world.

Buck was not doing anything tragic or

wrong — except so far as to do nothing is always both wrong and tragic—he was “passing time” according to the less than glow-worm light that was within him: but so much had Eugenia set, as it were, at stake upon him, that she could have killed him with her own hands, for his own sake, in default of striking him to fuller consciousness of life. “Let me seal this treasure-box which I have found,” one feels sometimes, “if indeed it be empty!”

As the young men passed down the garden-walk towards the terrace, sauntering and smoking—still before her window, but ever tightening her heart-strings by increasing distance—she hid her burning face in her cold hands, and slid down upon her knees by the window, praying desperately—anyhow—with texts rather than prayers, one text that haunted her beyond the rest: “I pray—not that Thou would’st take him out of the world—but that Thou would’st keep him from the evil;” and

with the dizzy beating of her heart, she would perhaps have presently become unconscious, had she not been hurt, at last, by the painful pressure of the polished boards against her knees.

When she looked up, eleven o'clock was striking from tower and distant spire ; and, at once, she saw the biggest of the dark figures—distant from her now by the lawn's breadth—turn quickly towards the house again.

Evidently conversation languished ; and indeed the men had only come out of doors, as they were finishing their cigars, to see what the weather promised for the morrow, for the officers had to be off betimes in the morning. Vane acted as their host, for neither Mr. Tomlinson nor Mr. Buxton affected the smoking-room.

None of them were much in the way of lounging, out of Piccadilly. When they went to London, Buck and Crossley would, in their

own phrase, “have their hair cut, and walk down Bond Street, just to give the girls a treat,” but a walk in moonlit gardens—that was not “their usual form!” and soon Captain Boville’s voice was audible from the smoking-room window, calling them in. “Come in and have a B. and S., or let’s go to the billiard-room,” he said, “but shut the window; it blows confounded cold into this heat.”

Vane crossed the lawn at once, not only because he had been the offender in opening the window, but because he thought that Boville might prove more endurable company than Buck. Crossley hesitated.

“Get along in, with your rotten poetry,” said Buck, “I’m as squiffy as a lord already, and I want some air; but I don’t want any more poetry, and I don’t want any more sermons.” And so Crossley, who wished to supplant Buck, a little, in Boville’s favour,—being somewhat of a respecter of persons, regimental if not re-

ligious—and who had quite enough of Buck's adjectival conversation at Portsmouth, went in after Vane and shut the window. Then Eugenia felt that she and her beloved were alone together with the night.

Left to himself, Buck ceased to pretend lounging. He looked alertly round, and then he too recrossed the lawn, noiseless and swift as a panther, till he stood directly underneath Eugenia's casement. He could hardly believe his eyes, when he saw, finally and for all, that there was indeed no light in it; and he rubbed them roughly as if he feared they played him false.

As for Eugenia, silent though she was, and hidden behind curtains and screen of creepers, she could scarce persuade herself that he was not aware of her presence; her heart seemed to be crying out to him so loudly, and the wings of her soul to be so closely folded about him.

Buck pushed his hands through his hair,

and swore a little under his breath, as his wont was when perplexed. Perhaps he saw more clearly into the turbid pool of his thoughts, when he had skimmed it of this crust of its habitual expression! No doubt the moonshine made a sort of light, reflected in the mirror opposite the window, for it was evident that he was not going to take the apparent darkness of Eugenia's chamber for certain, without what he would have called "a try for it." The devil in him was roused and he would run all hazards. He strode across the path, coming right up under the wall of the house, still noiseless with excitement, but with all the liteness of his well-drilled limbs in play. He was close beneath the window now, too near for Eugenia to dare steal the slightest glimpse of him; but she feared he was going to do—something—she knew not what—something violent! she felt as if he would pull down the wall, and reveal

her cowering there. Then for one instant he was absolutely still. Eugenia shrank further back into a side recess by the window, where a writing-table fortunately projected a little way forward into the room. She had only time for one momentary spasm of terror, which seemed to turn her from flame to stone, when, with a slight indrawn whistle and an oath, he vaulted lightly up; and, resting his foot upon the rose-tree, bruising the scented blossoms to the ground in a white shower of leaves, he laid his strong veined hand upon her windowsill. He raised himself up by it, and leaned forward on his broad shoulder, till first his chestnut head appeared, and then she felt his breath upon her arm. He looked into the room,—quite dark and yet lit here and there by the gleaming of its mirrors in the moon—then, with wonderful strength and lightness, he gathered his mighty self together, and with a bound, swung himself bodily in at the window.

He stood before her in her own room.

They were quite close together: she so conscious of him, he so unwitting of her presence. There was not a hand's breadth between them: she could have touched his coat, as he stood leaning against the shutter; and the folds of the long curtains, from which he stooped to disentangle himself, were merged with the folds of her dress. He literally laid hold of her skirt with his hands.

Once landed in the room, he seemed puzzled what to do next. It was empty, he thought, that was evident; and he had better get out of it before any one came in; but should he go out at the door or back again into the garden by way of the rose-boughs? He would have a look round first, at all events. He would hear any one's approach, and he liked the sense of adventure which was upon him.

It was fortunate that Eugenia's fear was too stony, even to let her tremble, for the

room was still. Her recognition of her position was so sudden and so complete, it so entirely bound her nerves, that she could not have spoken had she wished to. And in truth it was well that she should risk no explanation. Locked in there, at that midnight hour, so utterly and undisturbedly alone ; the mutual understanding between those two passionate hearts would have brooked no words of parting. Eugenia knew this by some sort of instinct, for she could not be said to think.

Buck crossed the room in a couple of strides, glanced at himself in the moonlit glass, and pulled up his collar. The action would have been ridiculous had it not been so dreadful. His *insouciance* in face of the torture of the woman who loved him, was tragical. Then he looked for the door, feeling his way along by the writing-table in the centre of the room, and the sofa beyond it; but the *portière* was drawn, and, as the wall was hung all round

with tapestries, he could not form a notion of its whereabouts. This was lucky, for the locked door would perhaps have made him stay, and, at all events, have assured him that he was safe from disturbance till Eugenia came. But as it was, he began to fear that the room communicated, as it might easily have done, with Lady Shortlands' apartments, and he could not tell but what his lifting a curtain might bring him in view of a room where watchers were: for he had seen that the windows nearest to Eugenia's were faintly lit by Parfitt's vigilant taper, as she gazed, in a state of rapt self-content over her handiwork, upon her sleeping mistress.

At last he made up his provident mind to return by the garden; but on his way to the window, as he groped along, he came upon Eugenia's sloping-seated chair.

Even a wild and passionate nature, under the influence, more often of a common longing

than of a spiritual need, has moments—rare indeed were such, with Buck!—of a tenderness which is divine. Some tenderness like this, bred of the night, of love, of the heyday of youth, stirred in Buck's blood, as he laid his hot hand on the coolness of the silken cushions which seemed to tell him of her presence. He sat down heavily and sighed. His heart was sore within him; he was hurt, he was angry, he was sorry, he could have wept. The sting of tears was starting to his eyes, and for one instant he sobbed aloud. But no tears fell, and the sob was strangled in his throat; he put his arms upon the cushions and hid his glowing face between them.—“My darling,” he said hoarsely, “my darling!”

All this Eugenia saw clearly from her hiding-place, all this was turning her again from stone to fire. He was quite close to her, within her reach. She put out her hand. . . .

But the moment did not last. Buck sat

up again, he felt he was a fool: he bit his nails to the quick, he drew in his breath, he stared down into the quiet garden: "God!" he said between his set white teeth. Then he bit his nails fiercely again. Eugenia clasped her hands together, in the folds of her grey gown, "God!" she echoed—with a difference. Her heart stopped beating with the fervour of her prayer, she bowed her head.

He got up: he did not trouble to so much as smooth the rumpled chair-cover. He was not one to count consequences that might light on others. A thing once done was done, with him. He stood there again, full in her view, with the moonlight upon him. The tenderness had passed away—the roughness and the wrath of his disappointed spirit asserted themselves stormily, again. He came back to the window, he looked out upon the beauty of the sleeping lawns: but it did not turn his resentful heart. He spoke to himself half aloud: he blamed her. . . .

What he said need not be here recorded. It was not much, it was not new. It was a trenchant vulgar comment on her having failed him; and he believed himself alone. Ignorant as Eugenia was of the meaning of his words, which she but half caught, the sense that she had trifled with his passions, that she had deserved this insult, struck into her heart like a knife. For an instant she could neither hear nor see. She was dazed and blind. When the mist cleared from her eyes, only his sunburnt hand was visible above the sill. She could see his nails, his veins; his stiff cuff had scratched his wrist, there was a bruise, and above the bruise she saw a little cross, tattooed upon his arm. Then, he was gone.

He never looked behind him, he had 'wasted time enough upon her.' He swung himself down with a parting kick to the rose-boughs, but without one other word. He did not come

in sight again, he flung open the latch and let himself into the now empty smoking-room, by the window. He banged the window to, he poured himself out a tumbler full of brandy, and, when he had drunk it, he threw himself upon the chill morocco sofa. It was well that nobody came near him then.

By some strange influence, like *clairvoyance*, Eugenia knew exactly what he did, and she knew too, without reasoning, that he would not come out again, that she need have no more to fear. The worst was past. The instant that he was securely gone, ere yet he had given way to his paroxysm of temper in the room that was almost beneath hers, she trailed her body from its hiding-place, and, following his very footsteps, though unconsciously, she flung herself into the chair. "My boy," she said, "my love—my love—my love!"

Then she lay as still as death. Long afterwards, she recollected how the breeze had

stolen in to fan her, how the sleepy birds had called to each other, once and again, in the near branches. But of breeze or bird she knew nothing in that hour.

And in this dread inertness, this awful waking trance that was worse than any swoon, her reason woke. The words that he had used of her, started to life and faced her like a spell. What he had said, indeed, he did not mean. His language was always rough when he was with men; and, when he was alone, he expressed himself in still less guarded terms, without putting much significance into them. But the mere sound of his angry phrases had struck Eugenia with a deadly wound: they turned the pure unfailing current of her passion, into a brackish tide of shame. "Am I so false?" she said aloud, "am I so mean?" and she hid her face in her hands.

Suddenly she felt she could endure herself no longer, she must get rid of this oppression,

this darkness, this watching moon. She stood upright in the same place where her lover had been standing. She had no pity for herself: her lot was cast. She had loved wrongly, and loved in vain: practically, as far as the life of the heart went, she must die.

She went up to the window; she dared not shut it, for she felt she could not breathe if she did, but she drew the silken folds of the curtains across it, and over them let fall the heavier tapestry drapings. She shut out the moonlight and the stars and the roses; all spoke of him. Then she struck a light, which made the broidered warriors gleam strangely down at her, and the old chapel-furniture and lace start to a live reproach. She lit the wax-candles on the dressing-table; she wished to see what horrible change had befallen her; was her hair white, were her jaws fanged? was she withered and scorched to flame and ashes? She thought rather to see some fleshless devil or incarnate ghost, than her own image.

What did she see ?

This anguish of the heart, with all its pain, does not affect the face with change, like terror or illness. It is all part of an element of joy : it is only the other side of the passionate thrill which makes for beauty. There looked back upon Eugenia, out of the ivory frame of the glass, a face so radiantly lovely that she could scarcely deem it hers. Wet eyes that beamed, like stars, behind the starting tears which shone on their long lashes ; lips rosy with the coursing blood ; brows and cheeks, fair with the fairness of the dusk and of the dewy night, flushed like blush-roseleaves under the disarray of tumbled hair. She had the vivid satin jacket, still about her shoulders ; it gleamed, brilliant and soft, against the sombre back-ground of the tapestry ; but her grey dress was unfastened, and her heart-beats stirred the fervent alabaster of her breast to life. She was like some glorious picture of Titian's,

a Venus or a Magdalen. All unawares, until the mirror gave it back, she smiled a glad triumphant smile. Her sweet lips parted like a child's, her eyelids drooped: "It must be a good thing that makes one thus!" she thought. Then she sank backwards into a chair, still looking at her face, still thinking, not of herself but of Buck, as its creator and master. "Will he be content to give me up for Anne?" . . . she thought. "I can do nothing for him: she can do so much! . . . God helping me, he shall be hers."

She shivered: as she did so, something fell out of her pocket on to the floor, not with a noise but with a subtle gleam, that made her heed it half against her will. She picked it up. It was Sir Edmund's Spanish knife, which she had found between the leaves of Chatteris' poems. Like a wave, there swept over her consciousness a swirling host of recollections: her aunt's passion of wrath . . . its remedy;

her strange surcease of pain . . . her dreamless sleep. . . . Then followed odd quick echoes from the past—her own talk with Dr. Burroughes—the meaning of the questions she had asked him—the careless accuracy of his answers.

She drew the blade of the knife through her beautiful hands ; she felt the point of it against her wrist—she paused.

How still the night was, yet how far-off sleep !
Could people sleep ? and had she *ever* slept ?

If, at any cost of pain, she could get back her freedom and her sleep ?

If she could drain this fever from her veins ? . . .

She looked at herself again. To what end was all this lavish wealth of loveliness ? must it not bring her either weariness or shame, when the thought of its being for any husband but one, struck her so sick with dread ? and his, she must not be. He was for Anne.

But if, by one stroke, she could blast it all,

make herself undesired and calm and free—lose passion and gain peace?

Illness had no significance for her: she had never felt it: it was to lie quite still as her aunt was lying—nothing more.

Nor could she even think of herself as lying still: she would be weak and sleepy: that was all. She was so strong. Death was so far away.

Yes: she would drain the crimson tide from her cheeks and lips, the tell-tale throb from her bosom, the tingling from her limbs.

She bared her arm. Sir Edmund would have had it moulded in ivory or marble, Buck would have covered it with fervent boyish kisses.

Then her courage stood still, for just one breathing space; but it never failed her.

She looked hard at her face in the glass, with resolution and contempt: she said, to her reflected image, the words which she had heard Buck use, until her indignation mastered and possessed her, like the uncoiling of some

venomous snake: she loathed the poison of this passion in her blood.

“Come out of me!” she said, and with a quick, brave stroke, she struck the Spanish knife into her veins, just at the spot where she had marked the doctor’s lancet go, when Lady Shortlands’ withered arm had lain upon the bed.

Then she sat still and waited, suppressing an indignant cry. Her whole frame revolted at the torture, but the blood which gave such pangs of anguish and appeal refused to flow. She felt as if she had pricked her arm into flames: there was a scratch, a spurt of blood, but no tide followed.

Then she remembered that her aunt had been lying down.

Like a clock-work woman, she made her dreadful preparations, with a neatness which would have disgraced no hospital. She had no feeble feminine instincts to save herself from pain. She would have gone through

worse than this. She would have cut off her right hand, had she imagined that the secret of her self-rebuke lay there ; but it was in her heart, not in her hand.

She lay down : she put her head upon the silken cushion which had held his trouble, and where her own fair brows had rested in her thoughts of him : and she let the blood flow, pulsing forth with the beating of her heart, until, at last, a deadly chill broke out upon her : she shivered from head to foot with a shiver that she could not stop.

“ It is enough,” she said, but then again she waited : for the thought of him—the sudden presentation of his image to her sight—had stayed the shivering with a burning blush. Lips and cheeks glowed again.

At last she felt a gradual numbness stealing over her : it had seemed impossible that she could be colder than she was, but this was altogether different ;—not now the intermittent

trembling of a shiver, but a marble cold, like death's.

Listlessly, she raised her right arm, which had dealt the blow, and laid her hand upon her heart: its beat was weak and slow, hardly a pulse was discernible: she pictured him with all her might, tried to remember how she had seen him before her, in his sleep and in his tears, so dear and so beloved. But the image was blurred, the heart-beat did not quicken, "Now," she thought, "I must be dead indeed." Think of him as she might—with love, with shame—her pulse gave only hesitating throbs, her heart made no sign. "What does it all matter?" her languor seemed to say, "let be: what is life or death?"

Her head felt as if it were sinking deeper—deeper—into the pillows. The darkness gathered round her in great waves. Was this the Sussex sea? . . . a storm? . . . a dream? She was overcome with sleep. . . . Was it death? . . .

The thought roused her flickering senses : with an immense effort, she rallied, dragged her limbs from off the bed, and bound her arm, as she had seen the doctor do. Shuddering from head to foot, she slowly managed to undress herself ; her hair was loose already, else her numbed, nerveless fingers would not have had the strength to unbind it—the nails on them were blue. The labour of loosening her garments seemed to have overtasked her powers ; as she looked again at the bed, it appeared far away from her. With a wan, pitiful smile, she wondered if she should ever get back to it.

And yet this rallying, that she had forced upon herself, banished her drowsiness. Stretching out her hand for support she touched the bookcase : she drew a volume from the shelf and opened it. It was an old copy of Shakespeare.

At first she could not read the words she had lighted on ; her sight was dim, she began

to fear that she was moving in her sleep, that it was all a futile dream.

Once again she leaned forward, and looked for her reflection in the old Venetian mirror. She saw no woman, but a ghost indeed. As she crouched over the book in her white bed-gown, its linen was not whiter than her face. What was come to her beauty? She was pale as the sheeted dead.

This was no dream, she was awake, wide-eyed. What had she done?

Forcing her gaze, she glanced down at the page once more; why was it all of passion? Was this, she had foregone, the one thing that gave zest to life? Why no peace? no rest? no praise of loveless days?

After a while, she made out the words, though they came and went before her:

—“*Men have died indeed,—and
‘worms have eaten them . . . but not for love!’*”

She let the volume fall. ‘Death?’—‘Worms?’

on that, but now, so warm and lovely flesh!—was she to be the first that died for love?

Panic-stricken with swift terror, she dragged her trembling limbs across the floor and got back to the bed, smitten—at the book's suggestion—with that over-mastering fear which physical weakness brings. A terror of the bodily horror of death took hold upon her. "Give me back my life!" she cried, "Give me back my life!"

Still kneeling on the ground, she flung her arms across the low bedstead, and prayed with a passion of tears. . . .

Buck mastered his temper; it went out, as the brandy made him sleepy; his restlessness passed off and left him only cross; he made up his lordly mind to go to bed. He walked heavily upstairs; he "did not care a curse" whom he disturbed, he "had as good a right to go upstairs to bed, as any one of the whole damned crew." That was his frame of mind. He was more than a little muddled.

When he came to the division in the staircase, he hesitated ; then he went to the left, up the few steps leading to Eugenia's door.

He stopped the low indrawn whistle that was the usual accompaniment of his locomotion ; he rubbed his eyes ; he looked round, there was nobody in sight.

He cursed the clocks for ticking . . . he stood still. Perhaps he had been hard upon her. How did he know she was not waiting for him now, with her light shining forth into the sleeping garden ? But it was too much trouble to go out again and see.

He relented : he pulled himself together, jumped up the few stairs, and shook the handle of the white door, to make sure that the room was empty.

It was locked, and yet there was no response !

His face grew puzzled : with his nails he

beat a soft tattoo upon the door-panel.
(Eugenia heard it).

He tried to look in at the keyhole: but the *portière* darkened it.

(Eugenia knew the moment when he stooped—the moment when his breath was on the door. Her heart did not beat faster: she was past moving now: she prayed).

At last he made up his mind that she had gone to bed tired, and he swore at her again for a heartless flirt. But he was tired too: he had spoiled one night's rest, for her, he would not spoil another.

Sleep was heavy upon his eyes: what had seemed to him of so much importance, an hour before, did not matter now, in comparison with repose. If she could have come out and stood before him, he would have yawned in her face and wanted to get away.

His mood was changed: he stretched himself: he gave the panels a last push, hoping

it might wake her, but he did not care enough to wait and see. He swung himself downstairs again, and then upstairs to his room, and when he had got into it, he banged the door. He hustled off his clothes, and tumbled himself into bed, without so much as lighting a candle. He was fast asleep, by the time his curly head had touched the pillow. He laid aside his passion and his temper with his coat and his watch: the watch was worth something, but the passion was not worth a thought. He did not deserve one moment's care, one girl's good-will. He was the merest of mere men, "lower," past all reckoning, than any "angel," but "crowned with glory and worship." . . .

For still Eugenia knelt on. The wax-lights, lit upon her carven table, the lace on which had once really decked an altar, burned ever, austere and straight, and gave the room, more than before, its aspect of a chapel. They burned low, they burned out, and at last

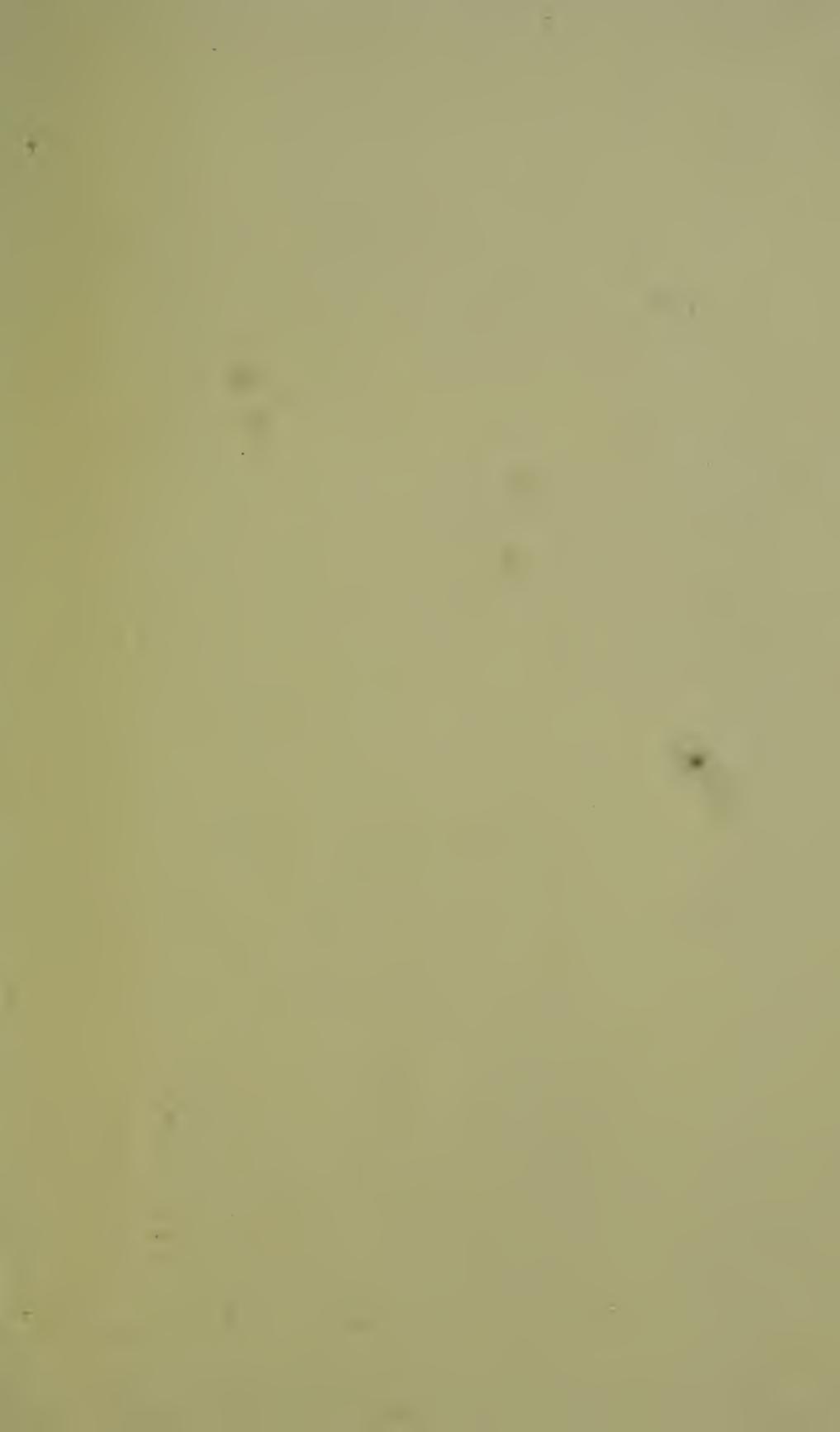
dawn brought her sleep—a sleep like death, born not of rest but of exhaustion. Still, in her sleep, her soul was praying for him still.

So is it, always, in the vigils of this distracted world, where the heart wakes in vain. Oh! perhaps thus, against our will, our treasure is laid up in Heaven!

And the poor labour day by day; night after night the unintended sick lie tossing on their pillows. Hireling curates pray for them, hireling nurses watch them. But the agony of passion and the climax of appeal,—unasked, unbought—these are for the comfortable fool that sleeps, without a dream, between his soft cool sheets, the drunken youngster, in his pride of life, that no love touches and no prayer can profit. God, out of Heaven, help us! Why should these things be?

END OF VOL. II.





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